ROLLING STONE

No. 96 November 25, 1971 UK 15 p 60¢

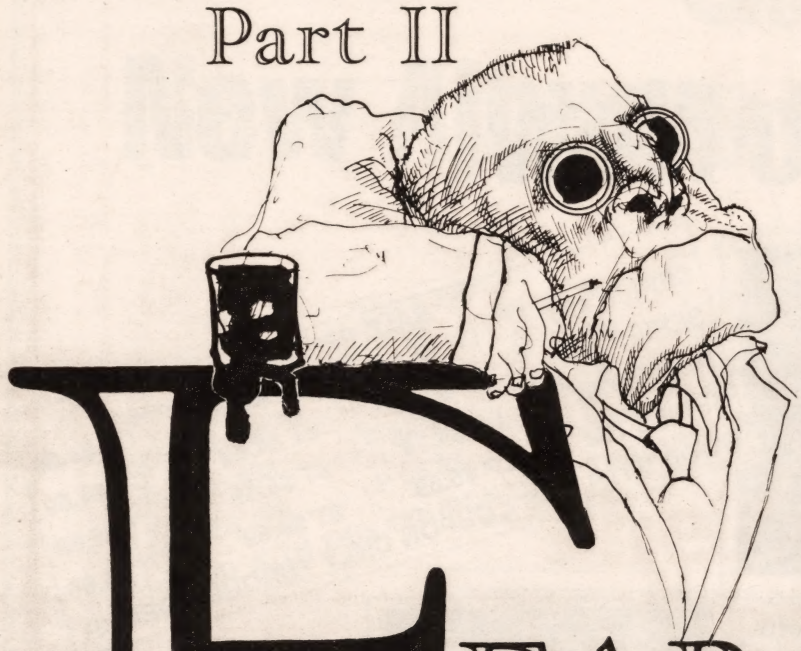
Duane Allman's Final Days on the Road

The Five Year Plan of Donovan P. Leitch

The Conclusion of Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas, A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream

"The sight of a 344-pound police chief from Waco, Texas, necking openly with his 290-pound wife when the lights were turned off for a Dope Film was just barely tolerable. . . ."
Ralph STEADman

Part II



FEAR & LOATHING IN LAS VEGAS: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream . . . by Raoul Duke

ABOUT 20 miles east of Baker I stopped to check the drug bag. The sun was hot and I felt like killing something. Anything. Even a big lizard. Drill the fucker. I got my attorney's .357 Magnum out of the trunk and spun the cylinder. It was loaded all the way around: Long, nasty little slugs —158 grains with a fine flat trajectory and painted aztec gold on the tips. I blew the horn a few times, hoping to call up an iguana. Get the buggers moving. They were out there, I knew, in that goddamn sea of cactus—hunkered down, barely breathing, and every one of the stinking little bastards was loaded with deadly poison.

Three fast explosions knocked me off balance. Three deafening, double-action blasts from the .357 in my right hand. Jesus! Firing at nothing, for no reason at all. Bad craziness. I tossed the gun into the front seat of the Shark and stared nervously at the highway. No cars either way; the road was empty for two or three miles in both directions.

Fine luck. It would not *do* to be found in the desert under these circumstances: firing wildly into the cactus from a car full of drugs. And especially not now, on the lam from the Highway Patrol.

Awkward questions would arise: "Well now, Mister . . . ah . . . Duke; you understand, of course, that it *is* illegal to discharge a firearm of any kind while standing on a federal highway?"

"What? Even in self-defense? This goddamn gun has a *hair trigger,* officer. The truth is I only meant to fire *once*—just to scare the little bastards."

A heavy stare, then speaking very slowly: "Are you saying, Mister Duke . . . that you were *attacked* out here?"

"Well . . . no . . . not literally attacked, officer, but seriously *menaced.* I stopped to piss, and the minute I stepped out of the car these filthy little bags of poison were all around me. They moved like *greased lightning!*"

Would this story hold up?

No. They would place me under arrest, then routinely search the car—and when that happened all kinds of savage hell would break loose. They would never believe all these drugs were necessary to my work; that in truth I was a professional journalist on my way to Las Vegas to cover the National District Attorney's Conference on Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs.

"Just samples, officer. I got this stuff off a road man for the Neo-American Church back in Barstow. He started acting funny, so I worked him over."

Would they buy this?

No. They would lock me in some hellhole of a jail and beat me on the kidneys with big branches—causing me to piss blood for years to come. . . .

* *. *

LUCKILY, nobody bothered me while I ran a quick inventory on the kit-bag. The stash was a hopeless mess, all churned together and half-crushed. Some of the mescaline pellets had disintegrated into a reddish-brown powder, but I counted about 35 or 40 still intact. My attorney had eaten all the reds, but there was quite a bit of speed left . . . no more grass, the coke bottle was empty, one acid blotter, a nice brown lump of opium hash and six loose amyls . . . Not enough for anything serious, but a careful rationing of the mescaline would probably get us through the four-day National District Attorney's Drug Conference.

On the outskirts of Vegas I stopped at a neighborhood pharmacy and bought two quarts of tequila, two fifths of Chivas Regal and a pint of ether. I was tempted to ask for some amyls. My angina pectoris was starting to act up. But the druggist had the eyes of a mean Baptist hysteric. I told him I needed the ether to get the tape off my legs, but by that time he'd already rung the stuff up and bagged it. He didn't give a fuck about ether.

I wondered what he would say if I asked him for $22 worth of Romilar and a tank of nitrous oxide. Probably he would have sold it to me. Why not? Free enterprise. . . . Give the public what it needs—especially this bad-sweaty, nervous-talkin' fella with tape all over his legs and this terrible cough, along with angina pectoris and these godawful Aneuristic flashes every time he gets in the sun. *I mean this fella was in bad shape, officer. How the hell was I to know he'd walk straight out to his car and start abusing those drugs?*

How indeed? I lingered a moment at the magazine rack, then got a grip on myself and hurried outside to the car. The idea of going completely crazy on laughing gas in the middle of a DAs' drug conference had a definite warped appeal. But not on the *first day,* I thought. Save that for later. No point getting busted and committed before the conference even starts.

I stole a Review-Journal from a rack in the parking lot, but I threw it away after reading a story on page one:

SURGERY UNCERTAIN
AFTER EYES REMOVED

BALTIMORE (UPI) — Doctors said Friday they were uncertain whether surgery would succeed in restoring the eyesight of a young man who pulled out his eyes while suffering the effects of a drug overdose in a jail cell.

Charles Innes, Jr., 25, underwent surgery late Thursday at Maryland General Hospital but doctors said it may be weeks before they could determine the outcome.

A statement issued by the hospital reported that Innes "had no light perception in either eye prior to surgery and the possibility he will ever have light perception is extremely poor."

Innes, son of a prominent Massachusetts Republican, was found in a jail cell Thursday by a turnkey who said Innes had pulled out his eyeballs.

Innes was arrested Wednesday night while walking nude through a neighborhood near where he lived. He was examined at Mercy Hospital and then placed in a jail cell. Police and one of Innes' friends said he had taken an overdose of animal tranquilizer.

Police reported the drug was PCP, a Parke-Davis product not sold for human medical purposes since 1963. However, a spokesman for Parke-Davis said he thought the drug might be available on the black market.

Taken alone, the spokesman said PCP effects would not last more than 12 to 14 hours. However, the effects of PCP combined with an hallucinogen such as LSD were not known.

Innes told a neighbor last Saturday, the day after he first took the drug, that his eyes were bothering him and that he could not read.

Wednesday night police said Innes seemed to be in a deeply depressed state and so impervious to pain that he did not scream when he pulled out his eyes.

II

Another day, another convertible . . . & another hotel full of cops

THE FIRST ORDER of business was to get rid of the Red Shark. It was too obvious. Too many people might recognize it, especially the Vegas police; although as far as *they* knew, the thing was already back home in L.A. It was last seen running full bore across Death Valley on Interstate 15. Stopped and warned in Baker by the CHP . . . then suddenly disappeared. . . .

The last place they would look for it, I felt, was in a rental-car lot at the airport. I had to go out there anyway, to meet my attorney. He would be arrivng from L.A. in the late afternoon.

I drove very quietly on the freeway, gripping my normal instinct for great speed and sudden lane changes — trying to remain inconspicuous — and when I got there I parked the Shark between two old Air Force buses in a "utility lot" about half a mile from the terminal. Very tall buses. Make it hard as possible for the fuckers. A little walking never hurt anybody.

By the time I got to the terminal I was pouring sweat. But nothing abnormal. I tend to sweat heavily in warm climates. My clothes are soaking wet from dawn to dusk. This worried me at first, but when I went to a doctor and described my normal daily intake of booze, drugs and poison he told me to come back when the sweating *stopped.* That would be the danger point, he said —a sign that my body's desperately overworked flushing mechanism had broken down completely. "I have great faith in the natural processes," he said. "But in *your* case . . . well . . . I find no precedent. We'll just have to wait and see, then work with what's left."

I spent about two hours in the bar, drinking Bloody Marys for the V-8 nutritional content and watching the flights from L.A. I'd eaten nothing but grapefruit for about 20 hours and my head was adrift from its moorings.

You better watch yourself, I thought. There *are* limits to what the human body can endure. You don't want to break down and start bleeding from the ears right here in the terminal. Not in *this* town. In Las Vegas they *kill* the weak and deranged.

I realized this, and kept quiet even when I felt symptoms of a terminal blood-sweat coming on. But this passed. I saw the cocktail waitress getting nervous, so I forced myself to get up and walk stiffly out of the bar. No sign of my attorney.

Down to the VIP car-rental booth, where I traded the Red Shark in for a White Cadillac Convertible. "This goddamn Chevy has caused me a lot of trouble," I told them. "I get the feeling that people are putting me down—especially in gas stations, when I have to get out & open the hood *manually.*"

"Well . . . of *course,*" said the man behind the desk. "What you need, I

think, is one of our Mercedes 600 Towne-Cruiser Specials, with air-conditioning. You can even carry your own fuel, if you want; we make that available . . . .

"Do I look like a goddamn Nazi?" I said. "I'll have a natural *American* car, or nothing at all!"

They called up the white Coupe de Ville at once. Everything was automatic. I could sit in the red-leather driver's seat and make every inch of the car *jump,* by touching the proper buttons. It was a wonderful machine: Ten grand worth of gimmicks and high-priced Special Effects. The rear-windows leaped up with a touch, like frogs in a dynamite pond. The white canvas top ran up and down like a roller-coaster. The dashboard was full of esoteric lights & dials & meters that I would never understand —but there was no doubt in my mind that I was into a *superior machine.*

The Caddy wouldn't get off the line quite as fast as the Red Shark, but once it got rolling—around 80—it was pure smooth hell . . . all that elegant, upholstered weight lashing across the desert was like rolling through midnight on the old California Zephyr.

I handled the whole transaction with a credit card that I later learned was "canceled"—completely bogus. But the Big Computer hadn't nixed me yet, so I was still a fat gold credit risk.

Later, looking back on this transaction, I *knew* the conversation that had almost certainly ensued:

"Hello. This is VIP car-rentals in Las Vegas. We're calling to check on Number 875-045-616-B. Just a routine credit check, nothing urgent. . . ."

(Long pause at the other end. Then:) "Holy shit!"

"What?"

"Pardon me. . . . Yes, we have that number. It's been placed on emergency redline status. Call the police at once and don't let him out of your sight!"

(Another long pause) "Well . . . ah . . . you see, that number is not on *our* current Red List, and . . . ah . . . Number 875-045-616-B just left our lot in a new Cadillac convertible."

"No!"

"Yes. He's long gone; totally insured."

"Where?"

"I think he said St. Louis. Yes, that's what the card says. Raoul Duke, left-fielder & batting champion of the St. Louis Browns. Five days at $25 per, plus 25 cents a mile. His card was valid, so of course we had no choice. . . ."

This is true. The car rental agency had no legal reason to hassle me, since my card was technically valid. During the next four days I drove that car all over Las Vegas—even passing the VIP agency's main office on Paradise Boulevard several times—and at no time was I bothered by any show of rudeness.

This is one of the hallmarks of Vegas hospitality. The only bedrock rule is Don't Burn the Locals. Beyond that, nobody cares. They would rather not know. If Charlie Manson checked into the Sahara tomorrow morning, nobody would hassle him as long as he tipped big.

* * *

I DROVE STRAIGHT to the hotel after renting the car. There was still no sign of my attorney, so I decided to check in on my own—if only to get off the street and avoid a public breakdown. I left the Whale in a VIP parking slot and shambled self-consciously into the lobby with one small leather bag—a hand-crafted, custom-built satchel that had just been made for me by a leathersmith friend in Boulder.

Our room was at the Flamingo, in the nerve-center of the Strip: right across the street from Caesar's Palace and the Dunes—site of the Drug Conference. The bulk of the conferees were staying at the Dunes, but those of us who signed up fashionably late were assigned to the Flamingo.

The place was full of cops. I saw this at a glance. Most of them were just standing around trying to look casual, all dressed exactly alike in their cut-rate Vegas casuals: plaid bermuda shorts, Arnie Palmer golf shirts and hairless white legs tapering down to rubberized "beach sandals." It was a terrifying scene to walk into—a super stakeout of some kind. If I hadn't known about the conference my mind might have snapped. You get the impression that somebody was going to be gunned down in a blazing crossfire at any moment—maybe the entire Manson Family.

My arrival was badly timed. Most of the national DAs and other cop-types had already checked in. These were the people who now stood around the lobby & stared grimly at newcomers. What appeared to be the Final Stakeout was only about 200 vacationing cops with nothing better to do. They didn't even *notice* each other.

I waded up to the desk and got in line. The man in front of me was a Police Chief from some small town in Michigan. His Agnew-style wife was standing about three feet off to his right while he argued with the desk clerk: "Look, fella—I *told* you I have a post-card here that says I have *reservations* in this hotel. Hell, I'm with the District Attorney's conference! I've already *paid* for my room."

"Sorry, sir. You're on the 'late list.' Your reservations were transferred to the . . . ah . . . Moonlight Motel, which is out on Paradise Boulevard and actually a very fine place of lodging and only 16 blocks from here, with its own pool and. . . ."

"You dirty little faggot! Call the manager! I'm tired of listening to this dogshit!"

The manager appeared and offered to call a cab. This was obviously the second or maybe even the third act in a cruel drama that had begun long before I showed up. The police chief's wife was crying; the gaggle of friends that he'd mustered for support were too embarrassed to back him up—even now, in this showdown at the desk, with this angry little cop firing his best and final shot. They *knew* he was beaten; he was going against the RULES, and the people hired to enforce those rules said "no vacancy."

After ten minutes of standing in line behind this noisy little asshole and his friends, I felt the bile rising. Where did this *cop*—of all people—get the nerve to argue with anybody in terms of Right & Reason? I had *been there* with these fuzzy little shitheads—and so, I sensed, had the desk clerk. He had the air of a man who'd been fucked around, in his time, by a fairly good cross-section of mean-tempered rule-crazy cops. . . .

So now he was just giving their argument back to them: It doesn't matter who's right or wrong, man . . . or who's paid his bill & who hasn't . . . what matters right now is that for the first time in my life I can work out on a pig: "Fuck you, *officer,* I'm in charge here, and I'm telling you we don't have room for you."

I was enjoying this whipsong, but after a while I felt dizzy, bad nervous, and my impatience got the better of my amusement. So I stepped around the Pig and spoke directly to the desk clerk. "Say," I said, "I hate to interrupt, but I have a reservation and I wonder if maybe I could just sort of slide through and get out of your way." I smiled, letting him know I'd been digging his snake-bully act on the cop party that was now standing there, psychologically off-balance and staring at me like I was some kind of water-rat crawling up to the desk.

I looked pretty bad: wearing old Levis and white Chuck Taylor All-Star basketball sneakers . . . and my ten peso Acapulco shirt had long since come apart at the shoulder seams from all that road-wind. My beard was about three days old, bordering on standard wino trim, and my eyes were totally hidden by Sandy Bull's Saigon-mirror shades.

But my voice had the tone of a man who *knows* he has a reservation. I was gambling on my attorney's foresight . . . but I couldn't pass a chance to put the horn into a cop:

. . . and I was right. The reservation was in my attorney's name. The desk-clerk hit his bell to summon the bag-boy. "This is all I have with me, right now," I said. "The rest is out there in that white Cadillac convertible." I pointed to the car that we could all see parked just outside the front door. "Can you have somebody drive it around to the room?"

The desk-clerk was friendly. "Don't worry about a thing, sir. Just enjoy your stay here—and if there's anything you need, just call the desk."

I nodded & smiled, half-watching the stunned reaction of the cop-crowd right next to me. They were stupid with shock. Here they were arguing with every piece of leverage they could command, for a room they'd already *paid for*—and suddenly their whole act gets side-swiped by some crusty drifter who looks like something out of an upper-Michigan hobo jungle. And he checks in with a handful of *credit cards!* Jesus! What's happening in this world?

What indeed? The bag-boy grinned. The desk-clerk grinned. And the cop crowd eyed me nervously. They had just been blown off the track by a style of freak they'd never seen before. I left them there to ponder it, fuming & bitching at the gates of some castle they would never enter.

III

Savage Lucy . . . 'teeth like baseballs, eyes like jellied fire'

I gave my bag to the boy who scurried up, and told him to bring a quart of Old Fitz and two fifths of Bacardi Anejo with a night's worth of ice.

Our room was in one of the farthest wings of the Flamingo. The place is far more than a hotel: It is a sort of huge under-financed Playboy Club in the middle of the desert. Something like nine separate wings, with interconnecting causeways & pools—a vast complex, sliced up by a maze of car-ramps & driveways. It took me about 20 minutes to wander from the desk to the distant wing we'd been assigned to.

My idea was to get into the room, accept the booze & baggage delivery, then smoke my last big chunk of Singapore Grey while watching Walter Cronkite and waiting for my attorney to arrive. I needed this break, this moment of peace and refuge, before we did the Drug Conference. It was going to be quite a different thing from the Mint 400. That had been an *observer* gig, but this one would need *participation*—and a very special stance: At the Mint 400 we were dealing with an essentially simpatico crowd, and if our behavior was gross and outrageous . . . well, it was only a matter of degree.

But this time our very *presence* would be an outrage. We would be attending the conference under false pretenses and dealing, from the start, with a crowd that was convened for the stated purpose of putting people like us in jail. We *were* the Menace—not in disguise, but stone-obvious drug abusers, with a flagrantly cranked-up act that we intended to push all the way to the limit . . . not to prove any final, sociological point, and not even as a conscious mockery: It was mainly a matter of lifestyle, a sense of obligation and even duty. If the Pigs were gathering in Vegas for a top-level Drug Conference, we felt the drug culture should be represented.

Beyond that, I'd been out of my head for so long now, that a gig like this seemed perfectly logical. Considering the circumstances, I felt totally meshed with my karma.

* * *

OR AT least I was feeling this way until I got to the big grey door that opened into Mini-Suite 1150 in the Far Wing. I rammed my key into the knob-lock and swung the door open, thinking, "Ah, home at last!" . . . but the door *hit* something, which I recognized at once as a human form: a girl of indeterminate age with the face and form of a Pit Bull. She was wearing a shapeless blue smock and her eyes were angry . . .

Somehow I knew that I had the right room. I wanted to think otherwise, but the vibes were hopelessly right . . . and she seemed to know, too, because she made no move to stop me when I moved past her and into the suite. I tossed my leather satchel on one of the beds and looked around for what I knew I would see . . . my attorney . . . stark naked, standing in the bathroom door with a drug-addled grin on his face.

"You degenerate pig," I muttered.

"It can't be helped," he said, nodding at the bulldog girl. "This is Lucy." He laughed distractedly. "You know — like Lucy in the sky with diamonds . . ."

I nodded to Lucy, who was eyeing me with definite venom. I was clearly some kind of enemy, some ugly intrusion on her scene . . . and it was clear from the way she moved around the room, very quick and tense on her feet, that she was sizing me up. She was ready for violence, there was not much doubt about that. Even my attorney picked up on it.

"Lucy!" he snapped. "Lucy! Be cool, goddamnit! Remember what happened at the airport . . . no more of that, OK?"

He smiled nervously at her. She had the look of a beast that had just been tossed into a sawdust pit to fight for its life . . .

"Lucy . . . this is my *client;* this is Mister Duke, the famous journalist. He's *paying* for this suite, Lucy. He's on *our* side."

She said nothing. I could see that she was not entirely in control of herself. Huge shoulders on the woman, and a chin like Oscar Bonavena. I sat down on the bed and casually reached into my satchel for the Mace can . . . and when I felt my thumb on the Shoot button I was tempted to jerk the thing out and soak her down on general principles. I desperately needed *peace,* rest, sanctuary. The last thing I wanted was a fight to the finish, in my own hotel room, with some kind of drug-crazed hormone monster.

My attorney seemed to understand this; he knew why my hand was in the satchel.

"No!" he shouted. "Not here! We'll have to move out!"

I shrugged. He was twisted. I could see that. And so was Lucy. Her eyes were feverish and crazy. She was staring at me like I was something that would have to be rendered helpless before life could get back to whatever she considered normal.

My attorney idled over and put his arm around her shoulders. "Mister Duke is my *friend,*" he said gently. "He loves artists. Let's show him your paintings."

For the first time, I noticed that the room was full of artwork — maybe 40 or 50 portraits, some in oil, some charcoal, all more or less the same size and all the same face. They were propped up on every flat surface. The face was vaguely familiar, but I couldn't get a fix on it. It was a girl with a broad mouth, a big nose and extremely glittering eyes — a demonically sensual face; the kind of over-stated, embarrassingly dramatic renderings that you find in the bedrooms of young female art students who get hung up on horses.

"Lucy paints portraits of Barbra Streisand," my attorney explained. "She's an artist up in Montana . . ." He turned to the girl. "What's that town where you live?"

She stared at him, then at me, then back at my attorney again. Then finally she said, "Kalispel. Way up north. I drew these from TV."

My attorney nodded eagerly. "Fantastic," he said. "She came all the way down here just to give all these portraits to Barbra. We're going over to the Americana Hotel tonight, and meet her backstage."

Lucy smiled bashfully. There was no more hostility in her. I dropped the Mace can and stood up. We obviously had a serious case on our hands. I hadn't counted on this: Finding my attorney whacked on acid & locked into some kind of preternatural courtship.

"Well," I said, "I guess they've brought the car around by now. Let's get the stuff out of the trunk."

He nodded eagerly. "Absolutely, let's get the stuff." He smiled at Lucy. "We'll be right back. Don't answer the phone if it rings."

She grinned and made the one-finger Jesus freak sign. "God bless," she said.

My attorney pulled on a pair of pants and a glaze-black shirt, then we hurried out of the room. I could see he was having trouble getting oriented, but I refused to humor him.

"Well . . ." I said. "What are your plans?"

"Plans?"

We were waiting for the elevator.

"Lucy," I said.

He shook his head, struggling to focus on the question. "Shit," he said finally. "I met her on the plane and I had all that acid." He shrugged. "You know, those little blue barrels. Jesus, she's a *religious* freak. She's running away from home for something like the fifth time in six months. It's terrible. I gave her that cap before I realized . . . shit, she's never even had a *drink!*"

"Well," I said, "it'll probably work out. We can keep her loaded and peddle her ass at the drug convention."

He stared at me.

"She's perfect for this gig," I said. "These cops will go fifty bucks a head to beat her into submission and then gang-fuck her. We can set her up in one of these back-street motels, hang pictures of Jesus all over the room, then turn these pigs loose on her . . . Hell, she's strong; she'll hold her own."

His face was twitching badly. We were in the elevator now, descending into the lobby. "Jesus Christ," he muttered. "I *knew* you were sick, but I never expected to hear you actually *say* that kind of stuff."

He seemed stunned.

I laughed. "It's straight economics. This girl is a *god-send!*" I fixed him with a natural Bogart smile, all teeth . . . "Shit, we're almost broke! And suddenly you pick up some muscle-bound loony who can make us a grand a day."

"No!" he shouted. "Stop *talking* like that!" The elevator door opened and we walked toward the parking lot.

"I figure she can do about four at a time," I said. "Christ, if we keep her full of acid that's more like *two grand* a day; maybe *three.*"

"You filthy bastard!" he sputtered. "I should cave your fucking head in!" He was squinting at me, shielding his eyes from the sun. I spotted the Whale about 50 feet from the door. "There it is," I said. "Not a bad looking car for a pimp . . ."

He groaned. His face reflected the struggle that I knew he was having, in his brain, with sporadic acid rushes: Bad waves of painful intensity, followed by total confusion. When I opened the trunk of the Whale to get the bags, he got angry. "What the hell are you *doing?*" he snapped. "This isn't Lucy's car."

"I know," I said, "It's mine. This is *my* luggage."

"The fuck it is!" he shouted. "Just because I'm a goddamn lawyer doesn't mean you can walk around stealing stuff right in front of me!" He backed away. "What the hell is *wrong* with you. We'll never beat a rap like this."

* * *

AFTER MUCH difficulty, we got back to the room and tried to have a serious talk with Lucy. I felt like a Nazi, but it had to be done. She was not *right* for us — not in this fragile situation. It was bad enough if she were only what she appeared to be—a strange young girl in the throes of a bad psychotic episode — but what worried me far more that that was the likelihood that she would probably be just sane enough, in a few hours, to work herself into a towering Jesus-based rage at the hazy recollection of being picked up and seduced in Los Angeles International Airport by some kind of cruel Samoan who fed her liquor and LSD, then dragged her to a Vegas hotel room and savagely penetrated every orifice in her body with his throbbing, uncircumcised member.

I had a terrible vision of Lucy crashing into Barbra Streisand's dressing room at the Americana and laying this brutal story on her. That would finish us. They would track us down and probably castrate us both, prior to booking . . .

I explained this to my attorney, who was now in tears at the idea of sending Lucy away. She was still powerfully twisted, and I felt the only solution was to get her as far as possible from the Flamingo before she got straight enough to remember where she's been and what happened to her.

Lucy, while we argued, was lying on the patio, doing a charcoal sketch of Barbra Streisand. From memory this time. It was a full-faced rendering, with teeth like baseballs and eyes like jellied fire.

The sheer intensity of the thing made me nervous. This girl was a walking bomb. God only knows what she might be doing with all that mis-wired energy right now if she didn't have her sketch pad. And what was she going to do when she got straight enough to read The Vegas Visitor, as I just had, and learn that Streisand wasn't due at the Americana for another three weeks?

My attorney finally agreed that Lucy would have to go. The possibility of a Mann Act conviction, resulting in disbarment proceedings and total loss of his livelihood, was a key factor in his decision. A nasty federal rap. Especially for a monster Samoan facing a typical white middle-class jury in Southern California.

"They might even call it kidnapping," I said. "Straight to the gas chamber, like Chessman. And even if you manage to beat *that,* they'll send you back to Nevada for Rape and Consensual Sodomy."

"No!" he shouted. "I felt *sorry* for the girl. I wanted to *help* her!"

I smiled. "That's what Fatty Arbuckle said, and you know what they did to him."

"Who?"

"Never mind," I said. "Just picture yourself telling a jury that you tried to help this poor girl by giving her LSD and then taking her out to Vegas for one of your special stark-naked back rubs."

He shook his head sadly. "You're right. They'd probably burn me at the goddamn stake . . . set me on fire right there in the dock. Shit, it doesn't pay to try to help somebody these days . . ."

We coaxed Lucy down to the car, telling her that we thought it was about time to "go meet Barbra." We had no trouble convincing her that she should take all her artwork, but she couldn't understand why my attorney wanted to bring her suitcase along. "I don't want to embarrass her," she protested. "She'll think I'm trying to move in with her, or something."

"No she won't," I said quickly . . . but that was all I could think of to say. I felt like Martin Bormann. What would happen to this poor wretch when we cut her loose? Jail? White slavery? What would Dr. Darwin do under these circumstances? (Survival of the . . . *fittest?* Was that the proper word? Had Darwin ever considered the idea of *temporary* unfitness? Like "temporary insanity." Could the Doctor have made room in his theory for a thing like LSD?)

All this was academic, of course. Lucy was a potentially fatal millstone on both

our necks. There was absolutely no choice but to cut her adrift and hope her memory was fucked. But some acid victims—especially nervous mongoloids—have a strange kind of *idiot-savant* capacity for remembering odd details and nothing else. It was possible that Lucy might spend two more days in the grip of total amnesia, then snap out of it with no memory of anything but our room number at the Flamingo. . . .

I thought about this . . . but the only alternative was to take her out to the desert and feed her remains to the lizards. I wasn't ready for this; it seemed a bit heavy for the thing we were trying to protect: My attorney. It came down to that. So the problem was to work out a balance, to aim Lucy in a direction that wouldn't snap her mind and provoke a disastrous backlash.

She had money. My attorney had ascertained that. "At least $200," he'd said. "And we can always call the cops up there in Montana, where she lives, and turn her in."

I was reluctant to do this. The only thing worse than turning her loose in Vegas, I felt, was turning her over to "the authorities" . . . and that was clearly out of the question, anyway. Not now. "What kind of goddamn monster *are* you?" I said. "First you kidnap the girl, then you rape her, and now you want to have her locked up!"

He shrugged. "It just occurred to me," he said, "that she has no witnesses. Anything she says about us is completely worthless."

"Us?" I said.

He stared at me. I could see that his head was clearing. The acid was almost gone. This meant that Lucy was probably coming down, too. It was time to cut the cord.

Lucy was waiting for us in the car, listening to the radio with a twisted smile on her face. We were standing about ten yards off. Anybody watching us from a distance might have thought we were having some kind of vicious, showdown argument about who had "rights to the girl." It was a standard scene for a Vegas parking lot.

We finally decided to make her a reservation at the Americana. My attorney ambled over to the car and got her last name under some pretense, then I hurried inside and called the hotel—saying that I was her uncle and that I wanted her to be "treated very gently," because she was an artist and might seem a trifle high-strung. The room clerk assured me they'd give her every courtesy.

Then we drove her out to the airport, saying we were going to trade the White Whale in for a Mercedes 600, and my attorney took her into the lobby with all her gear. She was still unhinged and babbling when he led her away. I drove around a corner and waited for him.

Ten minutes later he shuffled up to the car and got in. "Take off slowly," he said. "Don't attract any attention."

When we got out on Las Vegas Boulevard he explained that he'd given one of the airport cab-hasslers a $10 bill to see that his "drunk girlfriend" got to the Americana, where she had a reservation. "I told him to make sure she got there," he said.

"You think she will?"

He nodded. "The guy said he'd pay the fare with the extra five bucks I gave him, and tell the cabbie to humor her. I told him I had some business to take care of, but I'd be there myself in an hour—and if the girl wasn't already checked in, I'd come back out here and rip his lungs out."

"That's good," I said. "You can't be subtle in this town."

He grinned. "As your attorney, I advise you to tell me where you put the goddamn mescaline."

I pulled over. The kit-bag was in the trunk. He fetched out two pellets and we each ate one. The sun was going down behind the scrub hills northwest of the city. A good Kristofferson tune was croaking out of the radio. We cruised back to town through the warm dusk, relaxed on the red leather seats of our electric white Coupe de Ville.

"Maybe we should take it easy tonight," I said as we flashed past the Tropicana.

"Right," he said. "Let's find a good seafood restaurant and eat some red salmon. I feel a powerful lust for red salmon."

I agreed. "But first we should go back to the hotel and settle in. Maybe have a quick swim and some rum."

He nodded, leaning back on the seat and staring up at the sky. Night was coming down slowly.

IV
No refuge for degenerates . . . reflections on a murderous junkie

We drove through the parking lot of the Flamingo and around the back, through the labyrinth, to our wing. No problem with parking, no problem with the elevator, and the suite was dead quiet when we entered: half-dark and peacefully elegant, with big sliding walls opening out on the lawn and the pool.

The only thing moving in the room was the red-blinking message light on the telephone. "Probably room service," I said. "I ordered some ice and booze. I guess it came while we were gone."

My attorney shrugged. "We have plenty," he said. "But we might as well get more. Hell yes, tell them to send it up."

I picked up the phone and dialed the desk. "What's the message?" I asked. "My light is blinking."

The clerk seemed to hesitate. I could hear papers shuffling. "Ah yes," he said finally. "Mister Duke? Yes, you have two messages. One says, 'Welcome to Las Vegas, from the National District Attorney's Association.' "

"Wonderful," I said.

". . . and the other," he continued, "says, 'Call Lucy at the Americana, room 1600.' "

"What?"

He repeated the message. There was no mistake.

"Holy shit!" I muttered.

"Excuse me?" said the clerk.

I hung up.

* * *

MY ATTORNEY was doing the Big Spit, again, in the bathroom. I walked out on the balcony and stared at the pool, this kidney-shaped bag of bright water that shimmered outside our suite. I felt like Othello. Here I'd only been in town a few hours, and we'd already laid the groundwork for a classic tragedy. The hero was doomed; he had already sown the seed of his own downfall. . . .

But who was the Hero of this filthy drama? I turned away from the pool and confronted my attorney, now emerging from the bathroom and wiping his mouth with a towel. His eyes were glazed and limpid. "This goddamn mescaline," he muttered. "Why the fuck can't they make it a little less pure? Maybe mix it up with Rollaids, or something?"

"Othello used Dramamine," I said.

He nodded, hanging the towel around his neck as he reached out to flip on the TV set. "Yeah, I heard about those remedies. Your man Fatty Arbuckle used olive oil."

"Lucy called," I said.

"What?" He sagged visibly—like an animal taking a bullet.

"I just got the message from the desk. She's at the Americana, room 1600 . . . and she wants us to call."

He stared at me . . . and just then the phone rang.

I shrugged and picked it up. There was no point trying to hide. She had found us, and that was enough.

"Hello," I said.

It was the room clerk again.

"Mister Duke?"

"Yes."

"Hello Mister Duke. I'm sorry we were cut off a moment ago . . . but I thought I should call again, because I was wondering . . .

"What?" I sensed things closing down on us. This fucker was about to spring something on me. What had that crazy bitch *said* to him? I tried stay calm. "We're watching the goddamn news!" I screamed. "What the fuck are you interrupting me for?"

Silence.

"What do you *want?* Where's the goddamn ice I ordered? Where's the booze? There's a war on, man! People are being killed!"

"Killed?" He almost whispered the word.

"In Vietnam!" I yelled. "On the goddamn television!"

"Oh . . . yes . . . yes," he said. "This terrible war. When will it end?"

"Tell me," I said quietly. "What do you *want?"*

"Of course," he said, snapping back to his desk-clerk tone. "I thought I should tell you . . . because I know you're here with the Police Convention . . . that the woman who left that message for you sounded very *disturbed."*

He hesitated, but I said nothing.

"I thought you should know this," he said finally.

"What did you *say* to her?" I asked.

"Nothing. Nothing at all, Mister Duke. I merely took the message." He paused. "But it wasn't that easy, talking to that woman. She was . . . well . . . extremely nervous. I think she was crying."

"Crying?" My brain had locked up. I couldn't think. The drug was taking over. "Why was she crying?"

"Well . . . ah . . . she didn't say, Mister Duke. But since I knew the nature of your work I thought—"

"I know," I said quickly. "Look, you want to be gentle with that woman if she ever calls again. She's our *case study.* We're watching her very carefully." I felt my head unwinding now; the words came easily: "She's perfectly harmless, of course . . . there'll be no trouble . . . this woman has been into laudanum, it's a controlled experiment, but I suspect we'll need your cooperation before this thing is over."

"Well . . . *certainly,"* he said. "We're always happy to cooperate with the police . . . just as long as there won't be any trouble . . . for us, I mean."

"Don't worry," I said. "You're protected. Just treat this poor woman like you'd treat any other human being in trouble."

"What?" He seemed to be stuttering. "Ah . . . yes, yes, I see what you mean . . . yes . . . so *you'll* be responsible then?"

"Of course," I said. "And now I have to get back to the news."

"Thank you," he muttered.

"Send the ice," I said, and hung up.

My attorney was smiling peacefully at the TV set. "Good work," he said. "They'll treat us like goddamn lepers, after that."

I nodded, filling a tall glass with Chivas Regal.

"There hasn't been any *news* on the tube for three hours," he said absently. "That poor fool probably thinks we're plugged into some kind of special cop channel. You should call back and ask him to send up a 3000 watt sensing capacitator, along with the ice. Tell him ours just burned out . . ."

"You forgot about Lucy," I said. "She's looking for you."

He laughed. "No, she's looking for *you."*

"Me?"

"Yeah. She really flipped over you. The only way I could get rid of her, out there in the airport, was by saying you were taking me out to the desert for a showdown — that you wanted me out of the way so you could have her all to yourself." He shrugged. "Shit, I had to tell her something. I said she should go to the Americana and wait to see which one of us came back." He laughed again. "I guess she figures you won. That phone message wasn't for *me,* was it?"

I nodded. It made no sense at all, but I knew it was true. Drug reasoning. The rhythms were brutally clear — and, to him, they made *excellent* sense.

He was slumped in the chair, concentrating on *Mission Impossible.*

I thought for a while, then stood up and began stuffing things into my suitcase.

"What are you doing?" he asked.

"Never mind," I said. The zipper stuck momentarily, but I yanked it shut. Then I put on my shoes.

"Wait a minute," he said. "Jesus, you're not *leaving?"*

I nodded. "You're goddamn right, I'm leaving. But don't worry. I'll stop at the desk on my way out. You'll be taken care of."

He stood up quickly, kicking his drink over. "OK, goddamnit, this is *serious!* Where's my .357?"

I shrugged, not looking at him as I crammed the Chivas Regal bottles into my hand-satchel. "I sold it in Baker," I said. "I owe you 35 bucks."

"Jesus Christ!" he shouted. "That thing cost me a 190 goddamn dollars!"

I smiled. "You *told* me where you got that gun," I said. "Remember?"

He hesitated, pretending to think. "Oh yeah," he said finally. "Yeah . . . that punk out in Pasadena . . ." Then he flared again. "So it cost me a goddamn *grand.* That asshole shot a narc. He was looking at *life!* . . . shit, three weeks in court, and all I got was a fucking six-shooter."

"You're stupid," I said. "I warned you about dealing with junkies on credit — especially when they're *guilty.* You're lucky the bastard didn't pay you off with a bullet in the stomach."

My attorney sagged. "He was my *cousin.* The jury found him *innocent."*

"Shit!" I snapped. "How many people has that junkie bastard shot since we've known him? Six? Eight? That evil little fuck is so guilty that I should probably kill him myself, on general principles. He shot that narc just as sure as he killed that girl at the Holiday Inn . . . and that guy in Ventura!"

He eyed me coldly. "You better be careful, man. You're into some heavy *slander."*

I laughed, tossing my luggage together in a lump at the foot of the bed while I sat down to finish my drink. I actually intended to leave. I didn't really want to, but I figured that nothing I could possibly do with this gig was worth the risk of getting tangled up with Lucy . . . No doubt she was a beautiful person, if she ever got straight . . . very sensitive, with a secret reserve of fine karma underneath her Pit Bull act; a great talent with fine instincts . . . a heavy little gal who unfortunately went stone crazy somewhere prior to her 18th birthday.

I had nothing personal against her. But I knew she was perfectly capable—under these circumstances — of sending us both to prison for at least 20 years, on the strength of some heinous story we would probably never even hear until she took the stand:

"Yessir, those two men over there in the dock are the ones who gave me the LSD and took me to the hotel . . ."

"And what did they do then, Lucy?"

"Well, sir, I can't rightly remember . . ."

"Indeed? Well perhaps this document from the District Attorney's files will refresh your memory, Lucy . . . this is the statement you made to Officer Squane shortly after you were found wandering naked in the desert near Lake Mead.

" 'I don't know for sure what they done to me, but I remember it was horrible. One guy picked me up in the Los Angeles airport and he's the one who gave me the pill . . . and the other one met us at the hotel; he was sweating real bad and he talked so fast that I couldn't understand what he wanted . . . no sir, I don't recall *exactly* what they did to me at that point, because I was still under the influence of that drug . . . yes, the LSD they gave me . . . and I think I was naked for a long time, maybe the whole time they had me there. I think it was evening. I remember they had the news on. Yessir, Walter Cronkite, I remember his face all through it . . .' "

No, I was not ready for this. No jury would doubt her testimony, especially when it came stuttering out through a fog of tears and obscene acid flashbacks. And the fact that she couldn't recall precisely what we had done to her would make it impossible to deny. The jury would *know* what we'd done. They would have read about people like us in the $2.95 paperbacks (*Up to the Hilt* and *Only Skin Deep*). . . and seen our type in the $5 fuck-flicks.

And of course we couldn't possibly risk taking the stand in our own defense — not after they'd cleaned out the trunk of the Whale: "And I'd like to point out, Your Honor, that our Prosecution Exhibits A through Y are available to the jury — yes, this incredible collection of illegal drugs and narcotics which the defendants had in their possession at the time of their arrests and forcible seizure by no less than *nine* officers, six of whom are still hospitalized . . . and also Exhibit Z, sworn testimony by three professional narcotics experts selected by the president of the National District Attorneys' Conference — which was seriously embarrassed by the defendants' attempts to infiltrate, disrupt and pervert their annual convention . . . these experts have testified that the drug cache in the possession of these defendants at the time of the arrests was enough to *kill* an entire platoon of United States Marines . . . and gentlemen, I use the word kill with all due respect for the fear and loathing I'm sure it provokes in every one of you when you reflect that these *degenerate* rapists used this galaxy of narcotics to *completely destroy* the mind and morals of this once-innocent teenager, this *ruined* and degraded young girl who now sits before you in shame . . . yes, they fed this girl enough drugs to scramble her brains so horribly that she can no longer even *recall* the filthy details of that orgy she was forced to endure . . . and then they *used* her, ladies and gentlemen of the jury, for their own unspeakable ends!"

V
A terrible experience with extremely dangerous drugs

THERE WAS no way to cope with it. I stood up and gathered my luggage. It was important, I felt, to get out of town immediately.

My attorney seemed to finally grasp this. "Wait!" he shouted. "You can't leave me alone in this snake pit! This room is in my *name*."

I shrugged.

"OK, goddamnit," he said, moving toward the phone. "Look, I'll *call* her. I'll get her off our backs." He nodded. "You're right. She's my problem."

I shook my head. "No, it's gone too far."

"You'd make a piss-poor lawyer," he replied. "Relax. I'll handle this."

He dialed the Americana and asked for 1600. "Hi, Lucy," he said. "Yeah, it's me. I got your message . . . what? Hell no, I taught the bastard a lesson he'll never forget . . . what? . . . No, not dead, but he won't be bothering anybody for a while . . . yeah, I left him out there; I stomped him, then pulled all his teeth out . . ."

Jesus, I thought. What a terrible thing to lay on somebody with a head full of acid.

"But here's the problem," he was saying. "I have to *leave* here right away. That bastard cashed a bad check downstairs and gave *you* as a reference, so they'll be looking for both of you . . . yeah, I know, but you can't judge a book by its cover, Lucy; some people are just basically rotten . . . anyway, the last thing in the world you want to do is call this hotel again; they'll trace the call and put you straight behind bars . . . no, I'm moving to the Tropicana right away; I'll call you from there when I know my room number . . . yeah, probably two hours; I have to act casual, or they'll capture *me* too . . . I think I'll probably use a different name, but I'll let you know what it is . . . sure, just as soon as I check in . . . what? . . . . of course, we'll go to the Circus-Circus and catch the polar bear act; it'll freak you right out . . ."

He was nervously shifting the phone from ear to ear while he talked: "No . . . listen, I have to get off; they probably have the phone tapped . . . yeah, I know, it was horrible, but it's all over now . . . *O my God! They're kicking the door down!*" Suddenly he hurled the phone at the floor and began shouting; "No! Get away from me! I'm innocent! It was Duke! I swear to God!" He kicked the phone against the wall, then leaned down to it and began yelling again: "No, I don't know *where* she is! I think she went back to Montana. You'll never catch Lucy! She's gone!" He kicked the receiver again, then picked it up and held it about a foot away from his mouth as he uttered a long, quavering groan. "No! No! Don't put that *thing* on me!" he screamed. Then he slammed the phone down.

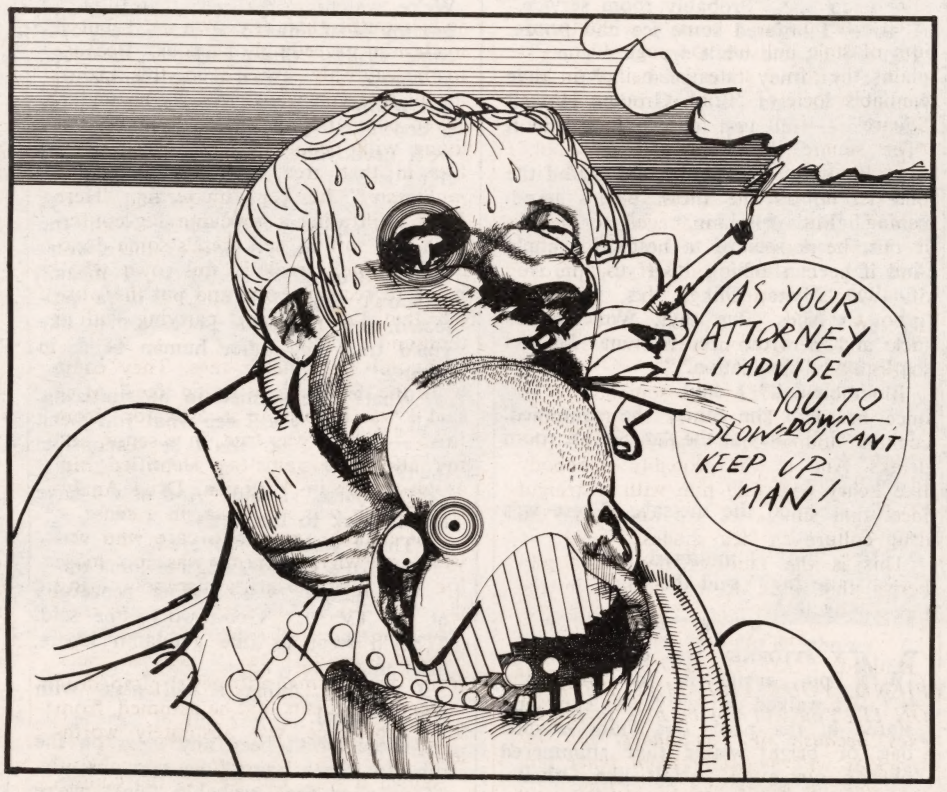
"Well," he said quietly. "That's that. She's probably stuffing herself down the incinerator about now." He smiled. "Yeah, I think that's the last we'll be hearing from Lucy."

I slumped on the bed. His performance had given me a bad jolt. For a moment I thought his mind had snapped — that he actually believed he was being attacked by invisible enemies.

But the room was quiet again. He was back in his chair, watching *Mission Impossible* and fumbling idly with the hash pipe. It was empty. "Where's that opium," he asked.

I tossed him the kit bag. "Be careful," I muttered. "There's not much left."

He chuckled. "As your attorney," he said, "I advise you not worry." He nodded toward the bathroom. "Take a



hit out of that little brown bottle in my shaving kit."

"What is it?"

"Adrenochrome," he said. "You won't need much. Just a little *tiny* taste."

I got the bottle and dipped the head of a paper match into it.

"That's about right," he said. "That stuff makes pure mescaline seem like ginger beer. You'll go completely crazy if you take too much."

I licked the end of the match. "Where'd you get *this?*" I asked. "You can't buy it."

"Never mind," he said. "It's absolutely pure."

I shook my head sadly. "Jesus! What kind of monster client have you picked up *this* time? There's only one source for this stuff . . ."

He nodded.

"The adrenaline glands from a *living* human body," I said. "It's no good if you get it out of a corpse."

"I know," he replied. "But the guy didn't have any cash. He's one of these Satanism freaks. He offered me human blood — said it would make me higher than I'd ever been in my life." he laughed. "I thought he was kidding, so I told him I'd just as soon have an ounce or so of pure adrenochrome — or maybe just a fresh adrenalin gland to chew on."

I could already feel the stuff working on me. The first wave felt like a combination of mescaline and methedrine. Maybe I should take a swim, I thought.

"Yeah," my attorney was saying. "They nailed this guy for child molesting, but he swears he didn't do it. 'Why should I fuck with *children?*' he says; 'They're too *small!*' " He shrugged. "Christ, what could I say? Even a goddamn werewolf is entitled to legal counsel . . . I didn't *dare* turn the creep down. He might have picked up a letter opener and gone after my pineal gland."

"Why not?" I said. "He could probably get Melvin Belli for that." I nodded, barely able to talk now. My body felt like I'd just been wired into a 220 volt socket. "Shit, we should get us some of that stuff." I muttered finally. "Just eat a big handful and see what happens."

"Some of what?"

"Extract of pineal."

He stared at me. "Sure." he said. "That's a *good* idea. One *whiff* of that shit would turn you into something out of a goddamn medical encyclopedia! Man, your head would swell up like a watermelon, you'd probably gain about a hundred pounds in two hours . . . claws, bleeding warts, then you'd notice about six huge hairy tits swelling up on your back . . ." He shook his head emphatically. "Man, I'll try just about *anything;* but I'd never in hell touch a pineal gland.

"Last Christmas somebody gave me a whole Jimson weed — the root must have weighed two pounds; enough for a *year* — but I ate the whole goddamn thing in about 20 minutes!"

I was leaning toward him, following his words intently. The slightest hesitation made me want to grab him by the throat and force him to talk faster. "Right!" I said eagerly. "Jimson weed! What happened?"

"Luckily, I vomited most of it right back up," he said. "But even so, I went blind for three days. Christ I couldn't even walk! My whole body turned to wax. I was such a mess that they had to haul me back to the ranch house in a wheelbarrow . . . they said I was trying to talk, but I sounded like a raccoon."

"Fantastic," I said. But I could barely hear him. I was so wired that my hands were clawing uncontrollably at the bedspread, jerking it right out from under me while he talked. My heels were dug into the mattress, with both knees locked . . . I could feel my eyeballs swelling, about to pop out of the sockets.

"Finish the fucking story!" I snarled. "What *happened?* What about the *glands?*"

He backed away, keeping an eye on me as he edged across the room. "Maybe you need another drink," he said nervously. "Jesus, that stuff got right on *top* of you, didn't it?"

I tried to smile. "Well . . . nothing worse . . . no, this *is* worse . . ." It was hard to move my jaws; my tongue felt like burning magnesium. "No . . . nothing to worry about," I hissed. "Maybe if you could just . . . shove me into the pool, or something . . ."

"Goddamnit," he said. "You took too *much*. You're about to explode. Jesus, look at your *face!*"

I couldn't move. Total paralysis now. Every muscle in my body was contracted. I couldn't even move my eyeballs, much less turn my head or talk.

"It won't last long," he said. "The first rush is the worst. Just ride the bastard out. If I put you in the pool right now, you'd sink like a goddamn stone."

Death. I was sure of it. Not even my lungs seemed to be functioning. I needed artificial respiration, but I couldn't open my mouth to say so. I was going to *die*. Just sitting there on the bed, unable to move . . . well at least there's no pain. Probably, I'll black out in a few seconds, and after that it won't matter.

My attorney had gone back to watching television. The news was on again. Nixon's face filled the screen, but his speech was hopelessly garbled. The only word I could make out was "sacrifice." Over and over again: "Sacrifice . . . sacrifice . . . sacrifice . . . ."

I could hear myself breathing heavily. My attorney seemed to notice. "Just stay relaxed," he said over his shoulder, without looking at me. "Don't try to fight it, or you'll start getting brain bubbles . . . strokes, aneurisms . . . you'll just wither up and die." His hand snaked out to change channels.

* * *

IT WAS after midnight when I finally was able to talk and move around . . . but I was still not free of the drug; the voltage had merely been cranked down from 220 to 110. I was a babbling nervous wreck, flapping around the room like a wild animal, pouring sweat and unable to concentrate on any one thought for more than two or three seconds at a time.

My attorney put down the phone after making several calls. "There's only one place where we can get fresh salmon," he said, "and it's closed on Sunday."

"Of course," I snapped. "These goddamn Jesus freaks! They're multiplying like rats!"

He eyed me curiously.

"What about the Process?" I said. "Don't they have a place here? Maybe a delicatessen or something? With a few tables in back? They have a fantastic menu in London. I ate there once; incredible food . . ."

"Get a grip on yourself," he said. "You don't want to even *mention* the Process in this town."

"You're right," I said. "Call Inspector Bloor. He knows about food. I think he has a *list.*"

"Better to call room service," he said. "We can get the crab looey and a quart of Christian Brothers muscatel for about 20 bucks."

"No!" I said. "We *must* get out of this place. I need air. Let's drive up to Reno and get a big tuna fish salad . . . hell, it won't take long. Only about 400 miles; no traffic out there on the desert . . ."

"Forget it," he said. "That's *Army territory*. Bomb tests, nerve gas — we'd never make it."

We wound up at a place called Big Flip about halfway downtown. I had a "New York steak" for $1.88. My attorney ordered "Coyote Bush Basket" for $2.09 . . . and after that we drank off a pot of watery "Golden West" coffee and watched four boozed-up cowboy types kick a faggot half to death between the pinball machines.

"The action never stops in this town." said my attorney as we shuffled out to the car. "A man with the right contacts could probably pick up all the fresh adrenochrome he wanted, if he hung around here for a while."

I agreed, but I wasn't quite up to it, right then. I hadn't slept for something like 80 hours, and that fearful ordeal with the drug had left me completely exhausted . . . tomorrow we would have to get serious. The drug conference was scheduled to kick off at noon . . . and we were still not sure how to handle it. So we drove back to the hotel and watched a British horror film on the late show.

VI
Getting down to business . . opening day at the drug convention

ON *behalf of the prosecuting attorneys of this county, I welcome you."*

We sat in the rear fringe of a crowd of about 1500 in the main ballroom of the Dunes Hotel. Far up in front of the room, barely visible from the rear, the executive director of the National District Attorneys' Association — a middle-

aged, well-groomed, successful GOP businessman type named Patrick Healy — was opening their Third National Institute on Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs. His remarks reached us by way of a big, low-fidelity speaker mounted on a steel pole in our corner. Perhaps a dozen others were spotted around the room, all facing the rear and looming over the crowd . . . so that no matter where you sat or even tried to hide, you were always looking down the muzzle of a big speaker.

This produced an odd effect. People in each section of the ballroom tended to stare at the nearest voice-box, instead of watching the distant figure of whoever was actually talking far up front, on the podium. This 1935 style of speaker placement totally depersonalized the room. There was something ominous and authoritarian about it. Whoever set up that sound system was probably some kind of Sheriff's auxiliary technician on leave from a drive-in theater in Muskogee, Oklahoma, where the management couldn't afford individual car speakers and relied on ten huge horns, mounted on telephone poles in the parking area.

A year or so earlier I had been to the Sky River Rock Festival in rural Washington, where a dozen stone-broke freaks from the Seattle Liberation Front had assembled a sound-system that carried every small note of an acoustic guitar — even a cough or the sound of a boot dropping on the stage — to half-deaf acid victims huddled under bushes a half mile away.

But the best technicians available to the National DAs' convention in Vegas apparently couldn't handle it. Their sound system looked like something Ulysses S. Grant might have rigged up to address his troops during the Seige of Vicksburg. The voices from up front crackled with a fuzzy, high-pitched urgency, and the delay was just enough to keep the words disconcertingly out of phase with the speaker's gestures.

"We must come to terms with the Drug Culture in this country . . . country . . . country! . . ." These echoes drifted back to the rear in confused waves. "The reefer butt is called a 'roach' because it resembles a cockroach . . . cockroach . . . cockroach . . ."

"What the fuck are these people talking about?" my attorney whispered. "You'd have to be crazy on acid to think a joint looked like a goddamn cockroach!"

I shrugged. It was clear that we'd stumbled into a prehistoric gathering. The voice of a "drug expert" named Bloomquist crackled out of the nearby speakers: ". . . about these flashbacks, the patient never knows; he thinks it's all over and he gets himself straightened out for six months . . . and then, darn it, the whole trip comes back on him."

Gosh darn that fiendish LSD! Dr. E. R. Bloomquist, MD, was the keynote speaker, one of the big stars of the conference. He is the author of a paperback book titled *Marijuana,* which — according to the cover — "tells it like it is." (He is also the inventor of the roach/cockroach theory . . .)

According to the book jacket, he is an "Associate Clinical Professor of Surgery (Anesthesiology) at the University of Southern California School of Medicine" . . . and also "a well known authority on the abuse of dangerous drugs." Dr. Bloomquist "has appeared on national network television panels, has served as a consultant for government agencies, was a member of the Committee on Narcotics Addiction and Alcoholism of the Council on Mental Health of the American Medical Association." His wisdom is massively reprinted and distributed, says the publisher. He is clearly one of the heavies on that circuit of second-rate academic hustlers who get paid anywhere from $500 to $1000 a hit for lecturing to cop-crowds.

Dr. Bloomquist's book is a compendium of stale bullshit. On page 49 he explains the "four states of being" in the cannabis society: "Cool, Groovy, Hip & Square" — in that descending order. "The square is seldom if ever cool," says Bloomquist. "He is 'not with it,' that is, he doesn't know 'what's happening.' But if he manages to figure it out, he moves up a notch to 'hip.' And if he can bring himself to approve of what's happening, he becomes 'groovy.' And after that, with much luck and perseverence, he can rise to the rank of 'cool.'"

Bloomquist writes like somebody who once bearded Tim Leary in a campus cocktail lounge and paid for all the drinks. And it was probably somebody like Leary who told him with a straight face, that sunglasses are known in the drug culture as "tea shades."

This is the kind of dangerous gibberish that used to be posted, in the form of mimeographed bulletins, in Police Dept. locker rooms.

Indeed: *"KNOW YOUR DOPE FIEND. YOUR LIFE MAY DEPEND ON IT! You will not be able to see his eyes because of Tea-Shades, but his knuckles will be white from inner tension and his pants will be crusted with semen from constantly jacking off when he can't find a rape victim. He will stagger and babble when questioned. He will not respect your badge. The Dope Fiend fears nothing. He will attack, for no reason, with every weapon at his command — including yours. BEWARE. Any officer apprehending a suspected marijuana addict should use all necessary force immediately. One stitch in time (on him) will usually save nine on you. Good luck.*

"The Chief."

Indeed. Luck is always important, especially in Las Vegas . . . and ours was getting worse. It was clear at a glance that this Drug Conference was not what we'd planned on. It was far too *open,* too mixed. About a third of the crowd looked like they'd just stopped by, for the show, enroute to a Frazier-Ali rematch at the Vegas Convention Center across town. Or maybe a benefit bout, for Old Smack Dealers, between Liston and Marshal Ky.

The room fairly bristled with beards, mustaches and super-Mod dress. The DAs' conference had obviously drawn a goodly contingent of undercover narcs and other twilight types. An assistant DA from Chicago wore a light-tan sleeveless knit suit: His lady was the star of the Dunes casino; she flashed through the place like Grace Slick at a Finch College class reunion. They were a classic couple; stone swingers.

Just because you're a cop, these days, doesn't mean you can't be With It. And this conference attracted some real peacocks. But my own costume — $40 FBI wingtips and a Pat Boone madras sportcoat — was just about right for the mass-median; because for every urban-hipster, there were about 20 crude-looking rednecks who could have passed for assistant football coaches at Mississippi State.

These were the people who made my attorney nervous. Like most Californians, he was shocked to actually *see* these people from The Outback. Here was the cop-cream from Middle America . . . and, Jesus, they looked and talked like a gang of drunken pig farmers!

I tried to console him. "They're actually nice people," I said, "once you get to know them."

He smiled: *"Know them?* Are you kidding? Man, I know these people in my goddamn *blood!"*

"Don't *mention* that word around here," I said. "You'll get them excited."

He nodded. "You're right. I saw these bastards in *Easy Rider,* but I didn't believe they were real. Not like *this.* Not *hundreds* of them!"

My attorney was wearing a double-breasted blue pinstripe suit, a far more stylish outfit than my own . . . but it made him exceedingly nervous. Because to be stylishly dressed in this crowd meant that you were probably an undercover cop, and my attorney makes his living with people who are very sensitive in that area. "This is a fucking *nightmare!*" he kept muttering. "Here I am infiltrating a goddamn Pig conference, but sure as hell there's some dope-dealing bomb freak in this town who's going to recognize me and put the word out that I'm out here partying with a thousand *cops!*"

We all wore name tags. They came with the $100 "registration fee." Mine said I was a "private investigator" from L.A. — which was true, in a sense; and my attorney's name-tag identified him as an expert in "Criminal Drug Analysis." Which was also true, in a sense.

But nobody seemed to care who was what, or why. Security was too loose for that kind of gritty paranoia. But we were also a bit tense because we'd given the registrar a *bad check* for our dual registration fee. It was a check from one of my attorney's pimp/drug underworld clients that he assumed, from long experience, was absolutely worthless.

Which it was. But so was the conference.

VII

If you don't know, come to learn . . . if you know, come to teach

—motto on invitations to National DAs' Convention in Vegas, April 25-29, 1971

THE FIRST session — the opening remarks — lasted most of the afternoon. We sat patiently through the first two hours, although it was clear from the start that we weren't going to *learn* anything and it was equally clear that we'd be crazy to try any *teaching.* It was easy enough to sit there with a head full of mescaline and listen to hour after hour of irrelevant gibberish. . . . There was certainly no *risk* involved. These poor bastards didn't know mescaline from macaroni.

I suspect we could have done the whole thing on acid . . . except for some of the people; there were faces and bodies in that group who would have been absolutely unendurable on acid. The sight of a 344-pound police chief from Waco, Texas, necking openly with his 290-pound wife (or whatever woman he had with him) when the lights were turned off for a Dope Film was just barely tolerable on mescaline — which is mainly a sensual/surface drug that exaggerates reality, instead of altering it — but with a head full of acid, the sight of two fantastically obese human beings far gone in a public grope while a thousand cops all around them watched a movie about the "dangers of marijuana" would not be emotionally acceptable. The brain would reject it: The medulla would attempt to close itself off from the signals it was getting from the frontal lobes . . . and the middle-brain, meanwhile, would be trying desperately to put a different interpretation on the scene, before passing it back to the medulla and the risk of physical action.

Acid is a relatively *complex* drug, in its effects, while mescaline is pretty simple and straightforward — but in a scene like this, the difference was academic. There was simply no call, at this conference, for anything but a massive consumption of Downers: Reds, Grass and Booze, because the whole program had apparently been set up by people who had been in a Seconal stupor since 1964.

Here were more than a thousand top-level cops telling each other "we *must* come to terms with the drug culture," but they had no idea where to start. They couldn't even *find* the goddamn thing. There were rumors in the hallways that maybe the Mafia was behind it. Or perhaps the Beatles. At one point somebody in the audience asked Bloomquist if he thought Margaret Mead's "strange behavior," of late, might possibly be explained by a private marijuana addiction.

"I really don't know," Bloomquist replied. "But at her age, if she did smoke grass, she'd have one hell of a trip."

The audience roared with laughter at this remark.

* * *

MY ATTORNEY leaned over to whisper that he was leaving. "I'll be down in the casino," he said. "I know a hell of a lot better ways to waste my time than listening to *this* bullshit." He stood up, knocking his ashtray off the arm of his chair, and plunged down the aisle toward the door.

The seats were not arranged for random movement. People tried to make a path for him, but there was no room to move.

"Watch yourself!" somebody shouted as he bulled over them.

"Fuck you!" he snarled.

"Down in front!" somebody else yelled.

By now he was almost to the door. "I have to get *out!*" he shouted. "I don't *belong* here!"

"Good riddance," said a voice.

He paused, looking around — then he seemed to think better of it, and kept moving. By the time he got to the exit the whole rear of the room was in turmoil. Even Bloomquist, far up front on the stage, seemed aware of a distant trouble. He stopped talking and peered nervously in the direction of the noise. Probably he thought a brawl had erupted — maybe a racial conflict of some kind, something that couldn't be helped.

I stood up and plunged toward the door. It seemed like as good a time as any to flee. "Pardon me, I feel sick," I said to the first leg I stepped on. It jerked back, and I said it again: "Sorry, I'm about to be sick . . . sorry, sick . . . beg pardon, yes, feeling sick. . . ."

This time a path opened very nicely. Not a word of protest. Hands actually helped me along. They feared I was about to vomit, and nobody wanted it —at least not on them. I made it to the door in about 45 seconds.

* * *

MY ATTORNEY was downstairs at the bar, talking to a sporty-looking cop about 40 whose plastic name-tag said he was the DA from someplace in Georgia. "I'm a whiskey man, myself," he was saying. "We don't have much problem with drugs down where I come from."

"You will," said my attorney. "One of these nights you'll wake up and find a junkie tearing your bedroom apart."

"Naw!" said the Georgia man. "Not down in *my* parts."

I joined them and ordered a tall glass of rum, with ice.

"You're another one of these California boys," he said. "Your friend here's been tellin' me about dope fiends."

"They're everywhere," I said. "Nobody's safe. And sure as hell not in the South. They like the warm weather."

"They work in pairs," said my attorney. "Sometimes in gangs. They'll climb right into your bedroom and sit on your chest, with big Bowie knives." He nodded solemnly. "They might even sit on your *wife's chest* — put the blade right down on her throat."

"Jesus God almighty," said the southerner. "What the hell's *goin' on* in this country?"

"You'd never believe it," said my attorney. "In L.A. it's out of control. First it was drugs, now it's witchcraft."

"Witchcraft? Shit, you can't mean it!"

"Read the newspapers," I said. "Man, you don't know trouble until you have to face down a bunch of these addicts gone crazy for human sacrifice!"

"Naw!" he said. "That's science fiction stuff!"

"Not where *we* operate," said my attorney. "Hell, in Malibu alone, these goddamn Satan-worshippers kill six or eight people *every day*." He paused to sip his drink. "And all they want is the *blood*," he continued. "They'll take people right off the *street* if they have to." He nodded. "Hell, yes. Just the other day we had a case where they grabbed a girl right out of a McDonald's hamburger stand. She was a waitress. About 16 years old . . . with a lot of people watching, too!"

"What happened?" said our friend. "What did they *do* to her?" He seemed very agitated by what he was hearing.

"Do?" said my attorney. "Jesus Christ man. They chopped her goddamn head off right there in the parking lot! Then they cut all kinds of holes in her and sucked out the blood!"

"God *almighty!*" The Georgia man exclaimed . . . "And nobody *did* anything?

"What *could* they do?" I said. "The guy that took the head was about six-seven and maybe three hundred pounds. He was packing two Lugers, and the others had M-16s. They were all veterans. . . ."

"The big guy used to be a major in the Marines," said my attorney. "We know where he lives, but we can't get near the house."

"Naw!" our friend shouted. "Not a major!"

"He wanted the pineal gland," I said "That's how he got so big. When he quit the Marines he was just a *little guy*."

"O my god!" said our friend. "That's horrible!"

"It happens every day," said my attorney. "Usually it's whole families. During the night. Most of them don't even wake up until they feel their heads going — and then, of course, it's too late."

The bartender had stopped to listen. I'd been watching him. His expression was not calm.

"Three more rums," I said. "With plenty of ice, and maybe a handful of lime chunks."

He nodded, but I could see that his mind was not on his work. He was staring at our name tags. "Are you guys with that police convention upstairs?" he said finally.

"We sure are, my friend," said the Georgia man with a big smile.

The bartender shook his head sadly. "I thought so," he said. "I never heard that kind of talk at this bar before. Jesus Christ! How do you guys *stand* that kind of work?"

My attorney smiled at him. "We *like* it," he said. "It's groovy."

The bartender drew back; his face was a mask of repugnance.

"What's wrong with you?" I said. "Hell, *somebody* has to do it."

He stared at me for a moment, then turned away.

"Hurry up with those drinks," said my attorney. "We're thirsty." He laughed and rolled his eyes as the bartender glanced back at him. "Only *two* rums," he said. "Make mine a Bloody Mary."

The bartender seemed to stiffen, but our Georgia friend didn't notice. His mind was somewhere else. "Hell, I really hate to hear this," he said quietly. "Because everything that happens in California seems to get down our way, sooner or later. Mostly Atlanta, but I guess that was back when the goddamn bastards were *peaceful*. It used to be that all we had to do was keep 'em under surveillance. They didn't roam around much. . . ." He shrugged. "But now, Jesus, *nobody's* safe. They could turn up anywhere."

"You're right," said my atorney. "We learned that in California. You remember where Manson turned up, don't you? Right out in the middle of Death Valley. He had a whole *army* of sex fiends out there. We only got our hands on a few. Most of the crew got away; just ran off across the sand dunes, like big lizards . . . and every one of them stone naked, except for the weapons."

"They'll turn up somewhere, pretty soon," I said. "And let's hope we'll be ready for them."

The Georgia man whacked his fist on the bar. "But we can't just lock ourselves in the house and be prisoners!" he exclaimed. "We don't even know who these people are! How do you *recognize* them?

"You can't," my attorney replied. "The only way to do it is to take the bull by the horns — go to the mat with this scum!"

"What do you mean by that?" he asked.

"You *know* what I mean," said my attorney. "We've done it before, and can damn well do it again."

"Cut their goddamn heads off," I said. "Every one of them. That's what we're doing in California."

"What?"

"Sure," said my attorney. "It's all on the Q.T., but everybody who *matters* is with us all the way down the line."

"God! I had no idea it was that bad out there!" said our friend.

"We keep it quiet," I said. "It's not the kind of thing you'd want to talk about upstairs, for instance. Not with the press around."

Our man agreed. "Hell no!" he said. "We'd never hear the goddamn end of it."

"Dobermans don't talk," I said.

"What?"

"Sometimes it's easier to just rip out the backstraps," said my attorney. "They'll fight like hell if you try to take the head without dogs."

"God almighty!"

We left him at the bar, swirling the ice in his drink and not smiling. He was worried about whether or not to tell his wife about it. "She'd never understand," he muttered. "You know how women are."

I nodded. My attorney was already gone, scurrying through a maze of slot machines toward the front door. I said goodbye to our friend, warning him not to say anything about what we'd told him.

VIII
Back door beauty . . . & finally a bit of serious drag racing on the strip

SOMETIME around midnight my attorney wanted coffee. He had been vomiting fairly regularly as we drove around The Strip, and the right flank of the Whale was badly streaked. We were idling at a stoplight in front of the Silver Slipper beside a big blue Ford with Oklahoma plates . . . two hoggish looking couples in the car, probably cops from Muskogee using the Drug Conference to give their wives a look at Vegas. They had just beaten Caesar's Palace for about $33 at the blackjack tables and they were headed for the Circus-Circus to whoop it up. . . .

. . . and suddenly, they found themselves next to a white Cadillac convertible all covered with vomit and a 300-pound Samoan in a yellow fishnet T-shirt yelling at them:

"Hey there! You folks want to buy some heroin?"

No reply. No sign of recognition. They'd been warned about this kind of crap: Just ignore it. . . .

"Hey, honkies!" my attorney screamed. "Goddamnit, I'm serious! I want to sell you some pure fuckin' *smack*!" He was leaning out of the car, very close to them. But still nobody answered. I glanced over, very briefly, and saw four middle-American faces frozen with shock, staring straight ahead.

We were in the middle lane. A quick left turn would be illegal. We would have to go straight ahead when the light changed, then escape at the next corner. I waited, tapping the accelerator nervously. . . .

My attorney was losing control: "Cheap heroin!" he was shouting. "This is the real stuff! You won't get hooked! Goddamnit, I *know* what I have here!" He whacked on the side of the car, as if to get their attention . . . but they wanted no part of us.

"You folks never talked to a *vet* before?" said my attorney. "I just got back from Veet Naam; This is *scag*, folks! Pure scag!"

Suddenly the light changed and the Ford bolted off like a rocket. I stomped on the accelerator and stayed right next to them for about 200 yards, watching for cops in the mirror while my attorney kept screaming at them: "Shoot! Fuck! Scag! Blood! Heroin! Rape! Cheap! Communist! Jab it right into your fucking eyeballs!"

We were approaching the Circus-Circus at high speed and the Oklahoma car was veering left, trying to muscle into the turn lane. I stomped the Whale into passing gear and we ran fender to fender for a moment. He wasn't up to hitting me; there was horror in his eyes. . . .

The man in the back seat lost control of himself . . . lunging across his wife and snarling wildly: "You dirty bastards! Pull over and I'll kill you! God damn you! You bastards!" He seemed ready to leap out the window and into our car, crazy with rage. Luckily the Ford was a two-door. He couldn't get out.

We were coming up to the next stoplight and the Ford was still trying to move left. We were both running full bore. I glanced over my shoulder and saw that we'd left the other traffic far behind; there was a big opening to the right. So I mashed on the brake, hurling my attorney against the dashboard, and in the instant the Ford surged ahead I cut across his tail and zoomed into a side-street. A sharp right turn across three lanes of traffic. But it worked. We left the Ford stalled in the middle of the intersection, hung in the middle of a screeching left turn. With a little luck, he'd be arrested for reckless driving.

* * *

MY ATTORNEY was laughing as we careened in low gear, with the lights out, through a maze of back streets behind the Desert Inn. "Jesus Christ," he said. "Those Okies were getting excited. That guy in the back seat was trying to *bite* me! Shit, he was frothing at the mouth." He nodded solemnly. "I should have maced the fucker . . . a criminal psychotic, total breakdown . . . you never know when they're likely to explode."

I swung the Whale into a turn that seemed to lead out of the maze—but instead of skidding, the bastard almost rolled.

"Holy shit!" my attorney screamed. "Turn on the fucking lights!" He was clinging to the top of the windshield . . . and suddenly he was doing the Big Spit again, leaning over the side.

I refused to slow down until I was sure nobody was following us — especially that Oklahoma Ford: those people were definitely dangerous, at least until they calmed down. Would they report that terrible quick encounter to the police? Probably not. It had happened too fast, with no witnesses, and the odds were pretty good that nobody would believe them anyway. The idea that two heroin pushers in a white Cadillac convertible would be dragging up and down the Strip, abusing total strangers at stoplights, was prima facie absurd. Not even Sonny Liston ever got that far out of control.

We made another turn and almost rolled again. The Coupe de Ville is not your ideal machine for high speed cornering in residential neighborhoods. The handling is very mushy . . . unlike the Red Shark, which had responded very nicely to situations requiring the quick four-wheel drift. But the Whale — instead of cutting loose at the critical moment—had a tendency to *dig in*, which accounted for that sickening "here we go" sensation.

At first I thought it was only because the tires were soft, so I took it into the Texaco station next to the Flamingo and had the tires pumped up to 50 pounds each — which alarmed the attendant, until I explained that these were "experimental" tires.

But 50 pounds each didn't help the cornering, so I went back a few hours later and told him I wanted to try 75. He shook his head nervously. "Not me," he said, handing me the air hose. "Here. They're your tires. *You* do it."

"What's wrong?" I asked. "You think they can't *take* 75?"

He nodded, moving away as I stooped to deal with the left front. "You're damn right," he said. "Those tires want 28 in the front and 32 in the rear. Hell, 50's *dangerous*, but 75 is *crazy*. They'll explode!"

I shook my head and kept filling the left front. "I told you," I said. "Sandoz laboratories designed these tires. They're special. I could load them up to a hundred.

"God almighty!" he groaned. "Don't do that here."

"Not today," I replied. "I want to see how they corner with 75."

He chuckled. "You won't even *get* to the corner, Mister."

"We'll see," I said, moving around to the rear with the air-hose. In truth, I was nervous. The two front ones were tighter than snare drums; they felt like teak wood when I tapped on them with the rod. But what the hell? I thought.

If they explode, so what? It's not often that a man gets a chance to run terminal experiments on a virgin Cadillac and four brand new $80 tires. For all I knew, the thing might start cornering like a Lotus Elan. If not, all I had to do was call the VIP agency and have another one delivered . . . maybe threaten them with a lawsuit because all four tires had exploded on me, while driving in heavy traffic. Demand an Eldorado, next time, with four Michelin Xs. And put it all on the card . . . charge it to the St. Louis Browns.

As it turned out, the Whale behaved very nicely with the altered tire pressures. The ride was a trifle rough; I could feel every pebble on the highway, like being on roller skates in a gravel pit . . . but the thing began cornering in a very stylish manner, very much like driving a motorcycle at top speed in a hard rain: one slip and ZANG, over the high side, cartwheeling across the landscape with your head in your hands.

* * *

ABOUT 30 minutes after our brush with the Okies we pulled into an all-night diner on the Tonopah highway, on the outskirts of a mean/scag ghetto called "North Las Vegas." Which is actually outside the city limits of Vegas proper. North Vegas is where you go when you've fucked up once too often on the Strip, and when you're not even welcome in the cut-rate downtown places around Casino Center.

This is Nevada's answer to East St. Louis — a slum and a graveyard, last stop before permanent exile to Ely or Winnemuca. North Vegas is where you go if you're a hooker turning 40 and the syndicate men on the Strip decide you're no longer much good for business out there with the high rollers . . . or if you're a pimp with bad credit at the Sands . . . or what they still call, in Vegas, "a hophead." This can mean almost anything from a mean drunk to a junkie, but in terms of commercial acceptability, it means you're finished in all the right places.

The big hotels and casinos pay a lot of muscle to make sure the high rollers don't have even momentary hassles with "undesirables." Security in a place like Caesar's Palace is super tense and strict. Probably a third of the people on the floor at any given time are either shills or watchdogs. Public drunks and known pickpockets are dealt with instantly—hustled out to the parking lot by Secret Service-type thugs and given a quick, impersonal lecture about the cost of dental work and the difficulties of trying to make a living with broken arms.

The "high side" of Vegas is probably the most closed society west of Sicily—and it makes no difference, in terms of the day to day life-style of the place, whether the Man at the Top is Lucky Luciano or Howard Hughes. In an economy where Tom Jones can make $75,000 a week for two shows a night at Caesar's, the palace guard is indispensable, and they don't care who signs their paychecks. A gold mine like Vegas breeds its own army, like any other gold mine. Hired muscle tends to accumulate in fast layers around money/power poles . . . and big money, in Vegas, is synonymous with the Power to protect it.

So once you get blacklisted on the Strip, for any reason at all, you either get out of town or retire to nurse your act along, on the cheap, in the shoddy limbo of North Vegas . . . out with the gunsels, the hustlers, the drug cripples and all the other losers. North Vegas, for instance, is where you go in Vegas if you need to score smack before midnight with no references.

But if you're looking for cocaine, and you're ready up front with some bills and the proper codewords, you want to stay on the Strip and get next to a well-connected hooker, which will take at least one bill for starters.

And so much for all that. We didn't fit the mold. There is no formula for finding yourself in Vegas with a white Cadillac full of drugs and nothing to mix with properly. The Fillmore style never quite caught on here. People like Sinatra and Dean Martin are still considered "far out" in Vegas. The "underground newspaper" here — The Las Vegas Free Press — is a cautious echo of The People's World, or maybe the National Guardian.

A week in Vegas is like stumbling into a Time Warp, a regression to the late Fifties. Which is wholly understandable when you see the people who come here, the Big Spenders from places like Denver and Dallas. Along with National Elks Club conventions (no niggers allowed) and the All-West Volunteer Sheepherders' Rally. These are people who go absolutely crazy at the sight of an old hooker stripping down to her pasties and prancing out on the runway to the big-beat sound of a dozen 50-year-old junkies kicking out the jams on "September Song."

* * *

IT WAS some time around three when we pulled into the parking lot of the North Vegas diner. I was looking for a copy of the Los Angles Times, for news of the outside world, but a quick glance at the newspaper racks made a bad joke of that notion. They don't need the Times in North Vegas. No news is good news.

"Fuck newspapers," said my attorney. "What we need right now is *coffee*."

I agreed, but I stole a copy of the Vegas Sun anyway. It was yesterday's edition, but I didn't care. The idea of entering a coffee shop without a newspaper in my hands made me nervous. There was always the Sports Section; get wired on the baseball scores and pro-football rumors: "Bart Star Beaten by Thugs in Chicago Tavern; Packers Seek Trade" . . . "Namath Quits Jets to be Governor of Alabama" . . . and a speculative piece on page 46 about a rookie sensation named Harrison Fire, out of Grambling: runs the hundred in nine flat, 344 pounds and still growing.

"This man Fire has definite promise," says the coach. "Yesterday, before practice, he destroyed a Greyhound Bus with his bare hands, and last night he killed a subway. He's a natural for color TV. I'm not one to play favorites, but it looks like we'll have to make room for him."

Indeed. There is always room on TV for a man who can beat people to jelly in nine flat . . . But not many of these were gathered, on this night, in the North Star Coffee Lounge. We had the place to ourselves—which proved to be fortunate, because we'd eaten two more pellets of mescaline on the way over, and the effects were beginning to manifest.

My attorney was no longer vomiting, or even acting sick. He ordered coffee with the authority of a man long accustomed to quick service. The waitress had the appearance of a very old hooker who had finally found her place in life. She was definitely *in charge* here, and she eyed us with obvious disapproval as we settled onto our stools.

I wasn't paying much attention. The North Star Coffee Lounge seemed like a fairly safe haven from our storms. There are some you go into — in this line of work — that you know will be heavy. The details don't matter. All you know, for sure, is that your brain starts humming with brutal vibes as you approach the front door. Something wild and evil is about to happen; and it's going to involve *you*.

But there was nothing in the atmosphere of the North Star to put me on my guard. The waitress was passively hostile, but I was accustomed to that. She was a big woman. Not fat, but large in every way, long sinewy arms and a brawler's jawbone. A burned-out caricature of Jane Russell: big head of dark hair, face slashed with lipstick and a 48 Double-E chest that was probably spectacular about 20 years ago when she might have been a Mama for the Hell's Angels chapter in Berdoo . . . but now she was strapped up in a giant pink elastic brassiere that showed like a bandage through the sweaty white rayon of her uniform.

Probably she was married to somebody, but I didn't feel like speculating. All I wanted from her, tonight, was a cup of black coffee and a 29¢ hamburger with pickles and onions. No hassles, no talk—just a place to rest and re-group. I wasn't even hungry.

My attorney had no newspaper or anything else to compel his attention. So he focused, out of boredom, on the waitress. She was taking our orders like a robot when he punched through her crust with a demand for "two glasses of ice water—with ice."

My attorney drank his in one long gulp, then asked for another. I noticed that she seemed tense.

Fuck it, I thought. I was reading the funnies.

About ten minutes later, when she brought the hamburgers, I saw my attorney hand her a napkin with something printed on it. He did it very casually, with no expression at all on his face. But I knew, from the vibes, that our peace was about to be shattered.

"What was that?" I asked him.

He shrugged, smiling vaguely at the waitress who was standing about ten feet away, at the end of the counter, keeping her back to us while she pondered the napkin. Finally she turned and stared . . . then she stepped resolutely forward and tossed the napkin at my attorney.

"What *is* this?" she snapped.

"A napkin," said my attorney.

There was a moment of nasty silence, then she began screaming: "Don't give me that bullshit! I *know* what it means! You goddamn fat pimp bastard!"

My attorney picked up the napkin, looked at what he'd written, then dropped it back on the counter. "That's the name of a horse I used to own," he said calmly. "What's *wrong* with you?"

"You sonofabitch!" she screamed. "I take a lot of shit in this place, but I sure as hell don't have to take it off a *spic pimp!*"

Jesus! I thought. What's happening? I was watching the woman's hands, hoping she wouldn't pick up anything sharp or heavy. I picked up the napkin and read what the bastard had printed on it, in careful red letters: "Back Door Beauty?" The question mark was emphasized.

The woman was screaming again: "Pay your bill and get the hell out! You want me to call the cops?"

I reached for my wallet, but my attorney was already on his feet, never taking his eyes off the woman . . . then he reached under his shirt, not into his pocket, coming up suddenly with the Gerber Mini-Magnum, a nasty silver blade which the waitress seemed to understand instantly.

She froze: her eyes fixed wildly on the blade. My attorney, still watching her, moved about six feet down the aisle and lifted the receiver off the hook of the pay phone. He sliced it off, then brought the receiver back to his stool and sat down.

The waitress didn't move. I was stupid with shock, not knowing whether to run or start laughing.

"How much is that lemon meringue pie?" My attorney asked. His voice was casual, as if he had just wandered into the place and was debating what to order.

"Thirty-five cents!" the woman blurted. Her eyes were turgid with fear, but her brain was apparently functioning on some basic motor survival level.

My attorney laughed. "I mean the *whole* pie," he said.

She moaned.

My attorney put a bill on the counter. "Let's say it's five dollars," he said. "OK?"

She nodded, still frozen. Watching my attorney as he walked around the counter and got the pie out of the display case. I prepared to leave.

The waitress was clearly in shock. The sight of the blade, jerked out in the heat of an argument, had apparently triggered bad memories. The glazed look in her eyes said her throat had been cut. She was still in the grip of paralysis when we left.

IX
Break down on Paradise Blvd.

EDITOR'S NOTE:
At this point in the chronology, Dr. Duke appears to have broken down completely; the original manuscript is so splintered that we were forced to seek out the original tape recording and transcribe it verbatim. We made no attempt to edit this section, and Dr. Duke refused even to read it. There was no way to reach him. The only address/contact we had, during this period, was a mobile phone unit somewhere on Highway 61—and all efforts to reach Duke at that number proved futile.

In the interests of journalistic purity, we are publishing the following section just as it came off the tape—one of many that Dr. Duke submitted for purposes of verification — along with his manuscript. According to the tape, this section follows an episode involving Duke, his attorney and a waitress at an all-night diner in North Vegas. The rationale for the following transaction appears to be based on a feeling—shared by both Duke and his attorney—that the American Dream would have to be sought out somewhere far beyond the dreary confines of the District Attor-

neys' Conference on Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs.

The transcription begins somewhere on the Northeast outskirts of Las Vegas —zooming along Paradise Road in the White Whale. . . .

Att'y: Boulder City is to the right. Is that a town?

Duke: Yeah.

Att'y: Let's go to Boulder City.

Duke: All right. Let's get some coffee somewhere . . .

Att'y: Right up here, Terry's Taco Stand, USA. I could go for a taco. Five for a buck.

Duke: Sounds horrible. I'd rather go somewhere where's there's one for 50¢.

Att'y: No . . . this might be the last chance we get for tacos.

Duke: . . . I need some coffee.

Att'y: I want tacos . . .

Duke: Five for a buck, that's like . . . *five hamburgers* for a buck.

Att'y: No . . . don't judge a taco by its price.

Duke: You think you might make a deal?

Att'y: I might. There's a hamburger for 29¢. Tacos are 29¢. It's just a cheap place, that's all.

Duke: Go bargain with them. . . . [*only garbled sounds here.—Ed.*]

Att'y: . . . Hello.

Waitress: May I help you?

Att'y: Yeah, you have tacos here? Are they Mexican tacos or just regular tacos? I mean, do you have chili in them and things like that?

Waitress: We have cheese and lettuce, and we have sauce, you know, put on them.

Att'y: I mean do you guarantee that they are authentic Mexican tacos?

Waitress: . . . I don't know. Hey Lou, do we have authentic Mexican tacos?

Lou: What?

Waitress: Authentic Mexican tacos.

Lou: We have tacos. I don't know how Mexican they are.

Att'y: Yeah, well, I just want to make sure I get what I'm paying for. 'Cause they're five for a dollar? I'll take five of them.

Duke: Taco burger, what's that?

[*Sounds of diesel engine trucks.—Ed.*]

Att'y: That's a hamburger with a taco in the middle.

Waitress: . . . instead of a shell.

Duke: A taco on a bun.

Att'y: I betcha your tacos are just hamburgers with a shell instead of a bun.

Waitress: I don't know . . .

Att'y: You just started working here?

Waitress: Today.

Att'y: I thought so, I've never saw you here before. You go to school around here?

Waitress: No, I don't go to school.

Att'y: Oh? Why not? Are you sick?

Duke: Never mind that. We came here for tacos.

[*Pause.*]

Att'y: As your attorney I advise you to get the chiliburger. It's a hamburger with chili on it.

Duke: That's too heavy for me.

Att'y: Then I advise you to get a taco burger, try that one.

Duke: . . . the taco has meat in it. I'll try that one. And some coffee now. Right now. So I can drink it while I'm waiting.

Waitress: That's all you want, one taco burger?

Duke: Well, I'll try it, I might want two.

Att'y: Are your eyes blue or green?

Waitress: Pardon?

Att'y: Blue or green?

Waitress: They change.

Att'y: Like a lizard?

Waitress: Like a cat.

Att'y: Oh, the lizard changes the color of his skin . . .

Waitress: Want anything to drink?

Att'y: Beer. And I have beer in the car. Tons of it. The whole back seat's full of it.

Duke: I don't like mixing coconuts up with beer and hamburgers.

Att'y: Well, let's smash the bastards . . . right in the middle of the highway . . . is Boulder City somewhere around here?

Waitress: Boulder City? Do you want sugar?

Duke: Yeah.

Att'y: We're *in* Boulder City, huh? Or very close to it?

Duke: I don't know.

Waitress: There it is. That sign says Boulder City, OK. Aren't you from Nevada?

Att'y: No. We've never been here before. Just traveling through.

Waitress: You just go straight up this road here.

Att'y: Any action up there in Boulder City?

Waitress: Don't ask me. I don't . . .

Att'y: Any gambling there?

Waitress: I don't know, it's just a little town.

Duke: Where is the casino?

Waitress: I don't know.

Att'y: Wait a minute, where are you from?

Waitress: New York.

Att'y: And you've just been here a day.

Waitress: No, I've been here for a while.

Att'y: Where do you go around here? Say you wanted to go swimming or something like that?

Waitress: In my backyard.

Att'y: What's the address?

Waitress: Um, go to the . . . ah . . . the pool's not open yet.

Att'y: Let me explain it to you, let me run it down just briefly if I can. We're looking for the American Dream, and we were told it was somewhere in this area. . . . Well, we're here looking for it, 'cause they sent us out here all the way from San Francisco to look for it. That's why they gave us this white Cadillac, they figure that we could catch up with it in that . . .

Waitress: Hey Lou, you know where the American Dream is?

Att'y (to Duke): She's asking the cook if he knows where the American Dream is.

Waitress: Five tacos, one taco burger. Do you know where the American Dream is?

Lou: What's that? What is it?

Att'y: Well we don't know, we were sent out here from San Francisco to look for the American Dream, by a magazine, to cover it.

Lou: Oh, you mean a place.

Att'y: A place called The American Dream.

Lou: Is that the old Psychiatrist's Club?

Waitress: I think so.

Att'y: The old Psychiatrist's Club?

Lou: Old Psychiatrist's Club, it's on Paradise . . . Are you guys serious?

Att'y: Oh, no honest, look at that car, I mean, do I look like I'd own a car like that?

Lou: Could that be the old Psychiatrist's Club? It was a discotheque place . . .

Att'y: Maybe that's it.

Waitress: It's on Paradise and what?

Lou: Ross Allen had the old Psychiatrist's Club. Is he the owner now?

Duke: I don't know.

Att'y: All we were told was, go till you find the American Dream. Take this white Cadillac and go find the American Dream. It's somewhere in the Las Vegas area.

Lou: That has to be the old . . .

Att'y: . . . and it's a silly story to do, but you know, that's what we get paid for.

Lou: Are you taking pictures of it, or . . .

Att'y: No, no—no pictures.

Lou: . . . or did somebody just send you on a goose chase?

Att'y: It's sort of a wild goose chase, more or less, but personally, we're dead serious.

Lou: That has to be the old Psychiatrist's Club, but the only people who hang out there is a bunch of pushers, peddlers, uppers and downers, and all that stuff.

Att'y: Maybe that's it. Is it a nighttime place or is it an all day . . .

Lou: Oh honey, this *never stops.* But it's not a casino.

Duke: What kind of place is it?

Lou: It's on Paradise, uh, the old Psychiatrist's Club's on Paradise.

Att'y: Is that what it's called, the old Psychiatrists' Club?

Lou: No that is what it used to be, but someone bought it, . . . but I didn't hear about it as the American Dream, it was something like, associated with, uh . . . it's a mental joint, where all the dopers hang out.

Att'y: A mental joint? You mean like a mental hospital?

Lou: No honey, where all the dope peddlers and all the pushers, everybody hangs out. It's a place where all the kids are potted when they go in, and everything . . . but it's not called what you said, the American Dream.

Att'y: Do you have any idea what it might be called? Or more or less where it might be located?

Lou: Right off of Paradise and Eastern.

Waitress: But Paradise and Eastern are parallel.

Lou: Yeah, but I know I come off of Eastern, and then I go to Paradise . . .

Waitress: Yeah I know it, but then that would make it off Paradise around the Flamingo, straight up here. I think somebody's handed you a . . .

Att'y: We're staying at the Flamingo. I think this place you're talking about and the way you're describing it, I think that maybe that's it.

Lou: It's not a tourist joint.

Att'y: Well, that's why they sent me. He's the writer: I'm the bodyguard. 'Cause I figure it will be . . .

Lou: These guys are nuts . . . these kids are nuts.

Att'y: That's OK.

Waitress: Yeah, they got new laws.

Duke: Twenty-four-hour-a-day violence? Is that what we're saying?

Lou: Exactly. Now here's the Flamingo . . . Oh, I can't show you this; I can tell you better my way. Right up here at the first gas station is Tropicana, take a right.

Att'y: Tropicana to the right.

Lou: The first gas station is Tropicana. Take a right on Tropicana and take this way . . . right on Tropicana, right on Paradise, you'll see a big black building, it's all painted black and real weird looking.

Att'y: Right on Tropicana, right on Paradise, black building . . .

Lou: And there's a sign on the side of the building that says Psychiatrist Club, but they're completely remodeling it and everything.

Att'y: All right, that's close enough . . .

Lou: If there's anything I can do for ya, honey . . . I don't know if that's even it or not. But it sounds like it is. I think you boys are on the right track.

Att'y: Right. That's the best lead we've had for two days, we've been asking people all around.

Lou: . . . I could make a couple calls and sure as hell find out.

Att'y: Could you?

Lou: Sure I'll call Allen and ask him.

Att'y: Gee, I'd appreciate that if you could.

Waitress: When you go down to Tropicana, it's not the first gas station, the second.

Lou: There's a big sign right down the street here, it says Tropicana Avenue. Make a right, and when you get to Paradise make another right.

Att'y: OK. Big black building, right on Paradise: 24-hour-a-day violence, drugs . . .

Waitress: See, here's Tropicana, and this is Boulder Highway that goes clear down like that.

Duke: Well that's pretty far into town then.

Waitress: Well, here's Paradise split up somewhere around there. There's Paradise. Yeah, we're down in here. See, this is Boulder Highway . . . and Tropicana.

Lou: Well, that's not it, that bartender in there is a pothead too . . .

Att'y: Yeah, well it's a lead.

Lou: You gonna be glad you stopped here, boys.

Duke: Only if we find it.

Att'y: Only if we write the article and get it in.

Waitress: Well, why don't you come inside and sit down.

Duke: We're trying to get as much sun as we can.

Att'y: She's going to make a phone call to find out where it is.

Duke: Oh. OK, well let's go inside.

X

Heavy duty at the airport . . . ugly Peruvian flashback . . . 'No it's too late, don't try it!'

MY ATTORNEY left at dawn. We almost missed the first flight to L.A. because I couldn't find the airport. It was less than 30 minutes from the hotel. I was sure of that. So we left the Flamingo at exactly 7:30 . . . but for some reason we failed to make the turnoff at the stoplight in front of the Tropicana. We kept going straight ahead on the freeway, which parallels the main airport runway, but on the *opposite* side from the terminal . . . and there is no way to get across legally.

"Goddamnit! We're lost!" my attorney was shouting. "What are we *doing* out here on this godforsaken road? The airport is right over there!" He pointed hysterically across the tundra.

"Don't worry," I said. "I've never missed a plane yet." I smiled as the memory came back. "Except once in Peru," I added. "I was already checked out of the country, through customs, but I went back to the bar to chat with this Bolivian cocaine dealer . . . and all of a sudden I heard those big 707 engines starting up, so I ran out to the runway and tried to get aboard, but the door was right behind the engines and they'd already rolled the ladder away. Shit, those afterburners would have fried me like bacon . . . but I was completely out of my head: I was desperate to get aboard, because I was carrying about 20 pounds of pure coke and I'd already been through customs.

"The airport cops saw me coming, and they gathered into a knot at the gate. I was running like a bastard, straight at them. The guy with me was screaming: 'No! It is too late! Don't try it!'

"I saw the cops waiting for me, so I slowed down like maybe I'd changed my mind . . . but when I saw them *relax,* I did a quick change of pace and tried to run right *over* the bastards." I laughed. "Jesus, it was like running full bore into a closet full of gila monsters. The fuckers almost killed me. All I remember is seeing five or six billyclubs coming down on me at the same time, and a lot of voices screaming: 'No! No! It's suicide! Stop the crazy gringo!'

"I woke up about two hours later in a bar in downtown Lima. They'd stretched me out in one of those half-moon leather booths. My luggage was all stack-

XI

Fraud? Larceny? Rape?... a brutal connection with the Alice from Linen Service

ed beside me. Nobody had opened it; they hadn't touched the coke . . . so I went back to sleep and caught the first flight out, the next morning."

My attorney was only half listening. "Look," he said, "I'd really like to hear more about your adventures in Peru, but not *now*. Right now all I care about is getting across that goddamn runway."

We were flashing along at good speed. I was looking for an opening, some kind of access road, some lane across the runway to the terminal. We were five miles past the last stoplight and there wasn't enough time to turn around and go back to it.

There was only one way to make it on time. I hit the brakes and eased the Whale down into the grassy moat between the two freeway lanes. The ditch was too deep for a head-on run, so I took it at an angle. The Whale almost rolled, but I kept the wheels churning and we careened up the opposite bank and into the oncoming lane. Thank Christ it was empty. We came out of the moat with the nose of the car up in the air like a hydroplane . . . then bounced on the freeway and kept right on going into the cactus field on the other side. I recall running over a fence of some kind and dragging it a few hundred yards, but by the time we got to the runway we were fully under control . . . screaming along about 60 miles an hour in low gear, and it looked like a wide-open run all the way to the terminal.

My only worry was the chance of getting crushed like a roach by an incoming DC-8, which we probably wouldn't see until it was right on top of us. I wondered if they could see us from the tower. Probably so, but why worry? I kept the thing floored. There was no point in turning back now.

My attorney was hanging onto the dashboard with both hands. I glanced over and saw fear in his eyes. His face appeared to be grey, and I sensed he was not happy with this move, but we were going so fast across the runway—then cactus, then runway again—that I knew he understood our position: We were past the point of debating the wisdom of this move; it was already done, and our only hope was to get to the other side.

I looked at my skeleton-face Accutron and saw that we had three minutes and 15 seconds before takeoff. "Plenty of time," I said. "Get your stuff together. I'll drop you right next to the plane." I could see the big red and silver Western jetliner about 1000 yards ahead of us . . . and by this time we were skimming across smooth asphalt, past the incoming runway.

"No!" he shouted. "I can't get out! They'll crucify me. I'll have to take the blame!"

"Ridiculous," I said. "Just say you were hitchhiking to the airport and I picked you up. You never saw me before. Shit, this town is full of white Cadillac convertibles . . . and I plan to go through there so fast that nobody will even glimpse the goddamn license plate."

We were approaching the plane. I could see passengers boarding, but so far nobody had noticed us . . . approaching from this unlikely direction. "Are you ready?" I said.

He groaned. "Why not? But for Christ's sake, let's do it fast!" He was scanning the loading area, then he pointed: "Over there!" he said. "Drop me behind that big van. Just pull in behind it and I'll jump out where they can't see me, then you can make a run for it."

I nodded. So far, we had all the room we needed. No sign of alarm or pursuit. I wondered if maybe this kind of thing happened all the time in Vegas — cars full of late-arriving passengers screeching desperately across the runway, dropping off wild-eyed Samoans clutching mysterious canvas bags who would sprint onto planes at the last possible second and then roar off into the sunrise.

Maybe so, I thought. Maybe this kind of thing is standard procedure in this town. . .

I swung in behind the van and hit the brakes just long enough for my attorney to jump out. "Don't take any guff from these swine," I yelled. "Remember, if you have any trouble you can always send a telegram to the Right People."

He grinned. "Yeah . . . Explaining my Position," he said. "Some asshole wrote a poem about that once. It's probably good advice, if you have shit for brains." He waved me off.

"Right," I said, moving out. I'd already spotted a break in the big hurricane fence—and now, with the Whale in low gear, I went for it. Nobody seemed to be chasing me. I couldn't understand it. I glanced in the mirror and saw my attorney climbing into the plane, no sign of a struggle . . . and then I was through the gate and out into the early morning traffic on Paradise Road.

* * *

I TOOK A FAST right on Russell, then a left onto Maryland Parkway . . . and suddenly I was cruising in warm anonymity past the campus of the University of Las Vegas . . . no tension on these faces; I stopped at a red light and got lost, for a moment, in a sunburst of flesh in the cross-walk: fine sinewy thighs, pink mini-skirts, nipples, sleeveless blouses, big sweeps of long hair, pink lips and blue eyes—all the hallmarks of a dangerously innocent culture.

I was tempted to pull over and start mumbling obscene entreaties: "Hey, Sweetie, let's you and me get weird. Jump into this hotdog Caddy and we'll flash over to my suite at the Flamingo, load up on ether and behave like wild animals in my private, kidney-shaped pool . . ."

Sure we will, I thought. But by this time I was far down the parkway, easing into the turn lane for a left at Flamingo Road. Back to the hotel, to take stock. There was every reason to believe I was heading for trouble, that I'd pushed my luck a bit far. I'd abused every rule Vegas lived by — burning the locals, abusing the tourists, terrifying the help.

The only hope now, I felt, was the possibility that we'd gone to such excess, with our gig, that nobody in a position to bring the hammer down on us could possibly *believe* it. Particularly not since we'd signed in with the Police Conference. When you bring an act into this town, you want to bring it in heavy. Don't waste any time with cheap shucks and misdemeanors. Go straight for the jugular. Get right into felonies.

The mentality of Las Vegas is so grossly atavistic that a really massive crime often slips by unrecognized. One of my neighbors recently spent a week in the Vegas jail for "vagrancy." He's about 20 years old: Long hair, Levi jacket, knapsack—an out-front *drifter*, a straight Road Person. Totally harmless; he just wanders around the country looking for whatever it was that we all thought we'd nailed down in the Sixties—sort of an early Bob Zimmerman trip.

On a trip from Chicago to L.A., he got curious about Vegas and decided to have a look at it. Just passing through, strolling along and digging the sights on the Strip . . . no hurry, why rush? He was standing on a street-corner near the Circus-Circus, watching the multi-colored fountain when the cop-cruiser pulled up.

Wham. Straight to jail. No phone call, no lawyer, no charge. "They put me in the car and took me down to the station," he said. "They took me into a big room full of people and told me to take off all my clothes before they booked me. I was standing in front of a big desk, about six feet tall, with a cop sitting behind it and looking down at me like some kind of medieval judge.

"The room was full of people. Maybe a dozen prisoners; twice that many cops, and about ten policewomen. You had to walk out in the middle of the room, then take everything out of your pockets and put it up on the desk and then strip naked—with everybody watching you.

"I only had about 20 bucks, and the fine for vagrancy was 25, so they put me over on a bench with the people who were going to jail. Nobody hassled me. It was like an assembly line.

"The two guys right behind me were longhairs. Acid people. They'd been picked up for vagrancy, too. But when they started emptying their pockets, the whole room freaked. Between them, they had $130,000, mostly in big bills. The cops couldn't believe it. These guys just kept pulling out wads of money and dumping it up there on the desk—both of them naked and kind of hunched over, not saying anything.

"The cops went crazy when they saw all that money. They started whispering to each other; shit, there was no way they could hold these guys for 'vagrancy.'" He laughed. "So they charged them with 'suspicion of evasion of income taxes.'

"They took us all to jail, and these two guys were just about nuts. They were dealers, of course, and they had their stash back in their hotel room—so they had to get out before the cops found out where they were staying.

"They offered one of the guards a hundred bucks to go out and get the best lawyer in town . . . and about 20 minutes later there he was, yelling about *habeas corpus* and that kind of shit . . . hell, I tried to talk to him, myself, but this guy had a one-track mind. I told him I could make bail and even pay him something if they'd let me call my father in Chicago, but he was too busy hustling for these other guys.

"About two hours later he came back with a guard and said 'Let's go.' They were out. One of the guys had told me, while they were waiting, that it was going to cost them $30,000 . . . and I guess it did, but what the hell? That's cheap, compared to what would have happened if they hadn't got themselves sprung.

"They finally let me send a telegram to my old man and he wired me 125 bucks . . . but it took seven or eight days; I'm not sure how long I was in there, because the place didn't have any windows and they fed us every 12 hours . . . you lose track of time when you can't see the sun.

"They had 75 guys in each cell—big rooms with a toilet bowl out in the middle. They gave you a pallet when you came in, and you slept wherever you wanted. The guy next to me had been in there for 30 years, for robbing a gas station.

"When I finally got out, the cop on the desk took another 25 bucks out of what my father sent me, on top of what I owed for the vagrancy fine. What could I say? He just *took* it. Then he gave me the other $75.00 and said they had a taxi waiting for me outside, for the ride to the airport . . . and when I got in the cab the driver said, 'We're not making any stops, fella, and you'd better not *move* until we get to the terminal.'

"I didn't move a goddamn muscle. He'd have shot me. I'm sure of that. I went straight to the plane and I didn't say a word to anybody until I knew we were out of Nevada. Man, that's one place I'll *never* go back to."

I was brooding on this tale as I eased the White Whale into the Flamingo parking lot. Fifty bucks and a week in jail for just standing on a corner and acting curious . . . Jesus, what kind of incredible penalties would they spew out on *me?* I checked off the various charges—but in skeleton, legal-language form they didn't seem so bad:

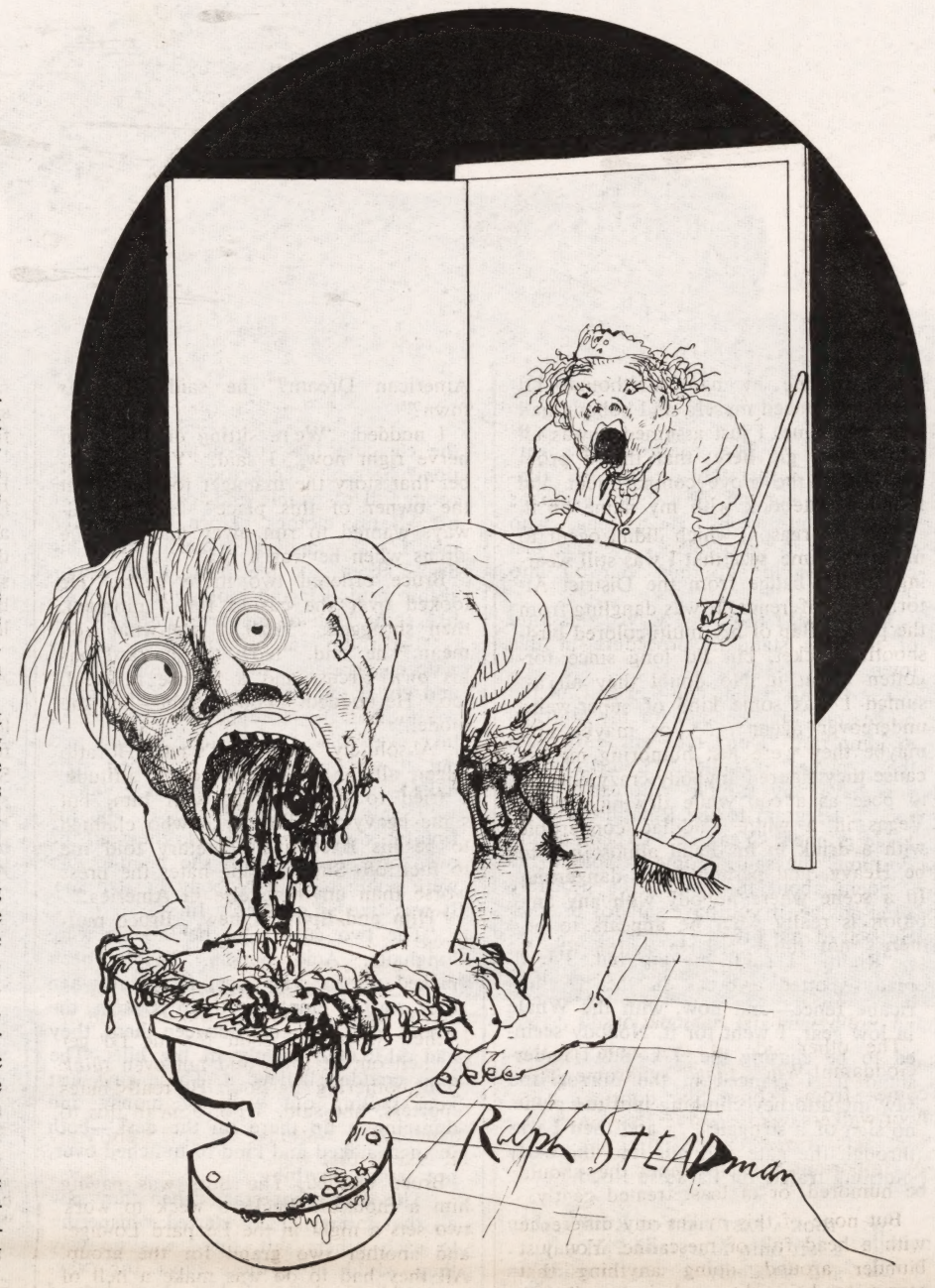
Rape? We could surely beat that one. I'd never even coveted the goddamn girl, much less put my hands on her flesh. Fraud? Larceny? I could always offer to "settle." Pay it off. Say I was sent out here by Sports Illustrated and then drag the Time, Inc. lawyers into a nightmare lawsuit. Tie them up for years with a blizzard of writs and appeals. Attach all their assets in places like Juneau and Houston, then constantly file motions for change of venue to Quito, Nome and Aruba . . . keep the thing moving, run them in circles, force them into conflict with the accounting department:

TIMESHEET FOR ABNER H. DODGE, CHIEF COUNSEL

Item: $44,066.12 . . . Special outlay, to wit: We pursued the defendant, R. Duke, throughout the Western Hemisphere and finally brought him to bay in a village on the north shore of an island known as Culebra in the Caribbean, where his attorneys obtained a ruling that all further proceedings should be conducted in the language of the Carib tribe. We sent three men to Berlitz for this purpose, but 19 hours before the date scheduled for opening arguments, the defendant fled to Colombia, where he established residence in a fishing village called Guajira near the Venezuelan border, where the official language of jurisprudence is an obscure dialect known as "Guajiro." After many months we were able to establish jurisdiction in this place, but by that time the defendant had moved his residence to a virtually inaccessible port at the headwaters of the Amazon River, where he cultivated powerful connections with a tribe of headhunters called "Jibaros." Our stringer in Manaus was dispatched upriver, to locate and hire a native attorney conversant in Jibaro, but the search has been hampered by serious communications problems. There is in fact grave concern, in our Rio office, that the widow of the aforementioned Manaus stringer might obtain a ruinous judgment—due to bias in local courts—far larger than anything a jury in our own country would consider reasonable or even sane.

Indeed. But what is sane? Especially here in "our own country" — in this doomstruck era of Nixon. We are all wired into a *survival* trip now. No more of the speed that fueled the Sixties. Uppers are going out of style. This was the fatal flaw in Tim Leary's trip. He crashed around America selling "consciousness expansion" without ever giving a thought to the grim meat-hook realities that were lying in wait for all the people who took him too seriously. After West Point and the Priesthood, LSD must have seemed entirely logical to him . . . but there is not much satisfaction in knowing that he blew it very badly for himself, because he took too many others down with him.

Not that they didn't deserve it: No doubt they all Got What Was Coming To Them. All those pathetically eager acid freaks who thought they could buy Peace and Understanding for three bucks a hit. But their loss and failure is ours, too. What Leary took down with him was the central illusion of a whole lifestyle that he helped to create . . . a generation of permanent cripples, failed seekers, who never understood the essential old-mystic fallacy of the Acid Culture: the desperate assumption that somebody—or at least some *force*—is tending that Light at the end of the tunnel.



THIS IS THE SAME cruel and paradoxically benevolent bullshit that has kept the Catholic Church going for so many centuries. It is also the military ethic . . . a blind faith in some higher and wiser "authority." The Pope, The General, The Prime Minister . . . all the way up to "God."

One of the crucial moments of the Sixties came on that day when the Beatles cast their lot with the Maharishi. It was like Dylan going to the Vatican to kiss the Pope's ring.

First "gurus." Then, when that didn't work, back to Jesus. And now, following Manson's primitive/instinct lead, a whole new wave of clan-type commune Gods like Mel Lyman, ruler of Avatar, and What's His Name who runs "Spirit and Flesh."

Sonny Barger never quite got the hang of it, but he'll never know how close he was to a king-hell breakthrough. The Angels blew it in 1965, at the Oakland-Berkeley line, when they acted on Barger's hardhat, con-boss instincts and attacked the front ranks of an anti-war march. This proved to be an historic schism in the then Rising Tide of the Youth Movement of the Sixties. It was the first open break between the Greasers and the Longhairs, and the importance of that break can be read in the history of SDS, which eventually destroyed itself in the doomed effort to reconcile the interests of the lower/working class biker/dropout types and the upper/middle, Berkeley/student activists.

Nobody involved in that scene, at the time, could possibly have foreseen the Implications of the Ginsberg/Kesey failure to persuade the Hell's Angels to join forces with the radical Left from Berkeley. The final split came at Altamont, four years later, but by that time it had long been clear to everybody except a handful of rock industry dopers and the national press. The orgy of violence at Altamont merely *dramatized* the problem. The realities were already fixed; the illness was understood to be terminal, and the energies of The Movement were long since aggressively dissipated by the rush to self-preservation.

* * *

AH THIS terrible gibberish. Grim memories and bad flashbacks, looming up through the time/fog of Stanyan Street . . . no solace for refugees, no point looking back. The question, as always, is *now* . . .?

I was slumped on my bed in the Flamingo, feeling dangerously out of phase with my surroundings. Something ugly was about to happen. I was sure of it. The room looked like the site of some disastrous zoological experiment involving whiskey and gorillas. The ten-foot mirror was shattered, but still hanging together—bad evidence of that afternoon when my attorney ran amok with the coconut hammer, smashing the mirror and all the lightbulbs.

We'd replaced the lights with a package of red and blue Christmas tree lights from Safeway, but there was no hope of replacing the mirror. My attorney's bed looked like a burned-out rat's nest. Fire had consumed the top half, and the rest was a mass of wire and charred stuffing. Luckily, the maids hadn't come near the room since that awful confrontation on Tuesday.

I had been asleep when the maid came in that morning. We'd forgotten to hang out the "Do Not Disturb" sign . . . so she wandered into the room and startled my attorney, who was kneeling, stark naked, in the closet, vomiting into his shoes . . . thinking he was actually in the bathroom, and then suddenly looking up to see a woman with a face like Mickey Rooney staring down at him, unable to speak, trembling with fear and confusion.

"She was holding that mop like an axe-handle," he said later. "So I came out of the closet in a kind of running crouch, still vomiting, and hit her right at the knees . . . it was pure instinct; I thought she was ready to kill me . . . and then, when she screamed, that's when I put the icebag on her mouth."

Yes. I remembered that scream . . . one of the most terrifying sounds I'd ever heard in my life. I woke up and saw my attorney grappling desperately on the floor right next to my bed with what appeared to be an *old woman*. The room was full of powerful electric noise. The TV set, hissing at top volume on a nonexistent channel. I could barely hear the woman's muffled cries as she struggled to get the icebag away from her face . . . but she was no match for my attorney's naked bulk, and he finally managed to pin her in a corner behind the TV set, clamping his hands on her throat while she babbled pitifully: "Please . . . please . . . I'm only the maid, I didn't *mean* nothin' . . ."

I was out of bed in a flash, grabbing my wallet and waving the gold Policemen's Benevolent Assn. press badge in front of her face.

"You're under arrest!" I shouted.

"No!" she groaned. "I just wanted to clean up!"

My attorney got to his feet, breathing heavily. "She must have used a pass key," he said. "I was polishing my shoes in the closet when I noticed her sneaking in—so I *took her.*" He was trembling, drooling vomit off his chin, and I could see at a glance that he understood the gravity of this situation. Our behavior, this time, had gone far past the boundaries of private kinkiness. Here we were, both naked, staring down at a terrified old woman—a hotel *employee*—stretched out on the floor of our suite in a paroxysm of fear and hysteria. She would have to be dealt with.

"What made you do it?" I asked her. "Who paid you off?"

"Nobody!" she wailed. "I'm the *maid!*"

"You're lying!" shouted my attorney. "You were after the evidence! Who put you up to this—the manager?"

"I work for the *hotel,*" she said. "All I do is clean up the rooms."

I turned to my attorney. "This means they know what we *have,*" I said. "So they sent this poor old woman up here to steal it."

"No!" she yelled. "I don't know what you're talking about!"

"Bullshit!' said my attorney. "You're just as much a part of it as they are."

"Part of *what?*"

"The dope ring," I said. "You *must* know what's going on in this hotel. Why do you think we're here?"

She stared at us, trying to speak but only blubbering. "I *know* you're cops," she said finally. "But I thought you were just here for that convention. I *swear!* All I wanted to do was clean up your room. I don't know anything about *dope!*"

My attorney laughed. "Come on, baby. Don't try to tell us you never heard of the Grange Gorman."

"No!" she yelled. "No! I swear to Jesus I never heard of that stuff!"

My attorney seemed to think for a moment, then he leaned down to help the old lady to her feet. "Maybe she's telling the truth," he said to me. "Maybe she's *not part* of it."

"No! I swear I'm not!" she howled.

"Well . . ." I said. "In that case, maybe we won't have to put her away . . . maybe she can *help.*"

"Yes!" she said eagerly. "I'll help you all you need! I *hate* dope!"

"So do we, lady," I said.

"I think we should put her on the payroll," said my attorney. "Have her checked out, then line her up for a Big One each month, depending on what she comes up with."

The old woman's face had changed markedly. She no longer seemed disturbed to find herself chatting with two naked men, one of whom had tried to strangle her just a few moments earlier.

"Do you think you could handle it?" I asked her.

"What?"

"One phone call every day," said my attorney. "Just tell us what you've seen." He patted her on the shoulder. "Don't worry if it doesn't add up. That's our problem."

She grinned. "You'd *pay* me for that?"

"You're damn right," I said. "But the first time you say anything about this, to *anybody*—you'll go straight to prison for the rest of your life."

She nodded. "I'll help any way that I can," she said. "But who should I call?"

"Don't worry," said my attorney. "What's your name?"

"Alice," she said. "Just ring Linen Service and ask for Alice.'

'You'll be contacted," I said. "It'll take about a week. But meanwhile, just keep your eyes open and try to act normal. Can you do that?"

"Oh, yes sir!" she said. "Will I see you gentlemen again?" She grinned sheepishly. "After *this,* I mean . . ."

"No," said my attorney. "They sent us down from Carson City. You'll be contacted by Inspector Rock. Arthur Rock. He'll be posing as a politician, but you won't have any trouble recognizing him."

She seemed to be shuffling nervously.

"What's wrong?" I said. "Is there something you haven't *told* us?"

"Oh no!" she said quickly. "I was just wondering—who's going to *pay* me?"

"Inspector Rock will take care of that," I said. "It'll all be in cash: a thousand dollars on the ninth of every month."

"Oh Lord!" she exclaimed. "I'd do just about anything for that!"

"You and a lot of other people," said my attorney. "You'd be surprised who we have on the payroll—right here in this same hotel."

She looked stricken. "Would I know them?"

"Probably," I said. "But they're all undercover. The only way you'll ever know is if something really serious happens and one of them has to contact you in public, with the password."

"What *is* it?" she asked.

" 'One hand washes the other,' " I said. "The minute you hear that, you say: 'I fear nothing.' That way, they'll *know* you."

She nodded, repeating the code several times, while we listened to make sure she had it right.

"OK," said my attorney. "That's it for now. We probably won't be seeing you again until the hammer comes down. You'll be better off ignoring us until we leave. Don't bother to make up the room. Just leave a pile of towels and soap outside the door, exactly at midnight." He smiled. "That way, we won't have to risk another one of these little incidents, will we?"

She moved toward the door. "Whatever you say, gentlemen. I can't tell you how sorry I am about what happened . . . but it was only because I didn't *realize.*"

My attorney ushered her out. "We understand," he said gently. "But it's all over now. Thank God for the *decent* people."

She smiled as she closed the door behind her.

XII
Return to the Circus-Circus . . . looking for the ape . . . to hell with the American Dream

ALMOST 72 hours had passed since that strange encounter, and no maid had set foot in the room. I wondered what Alice had told them. We had seen her once, trundling a laundry cart across the parking area as we rolled up in the Whale, but we offered no sign of recognition and she seemed to understand.

But it couldn't last much longer. The room was full of used towels; they were hanging everywhere. The bathroom floor was about six inches deep with soap bars, vomit, and grapefruit rinds, mixed with broken glass. I had to put my boots on every time I went in there to piss. The nap of the mottled grey rug was so thick with marijuana seeds that it appeared to be turning green.

The general back-alley ambience of the suite was so rotten, so incredibly foul, that I figured I could probably get away with claiming it was some kind of "Life-slice exhibit" that we'd brought down from Haight Street, to show cops

from other parts of the country how deep into filth and degeneracy the drug people will sink, if left to their own devices.

But what kind of addict would need all these coconut husks and crushed honeydew rinds? Would the presence of junkies account for all these uneaten french fries? These puddles of glazed catsup on the bureau?

Maybe so. But then why all this *booze?* And these crude pornographic photos, ripped out of pulp magazines like Whores of Sweden and Orgies in the Casbah, that were plastered on the broken mirror with smears of mustard that had dried to a hard yellow crust . . . and all these signs of violence, these strange red and blue bulbs and shards of broken glass embedded in the wall plaster . . .

No, these were not the hoofprints of your normal, godfearing junkie. It was far too savage, too aggressive. There was evidence, in this room, of excessive consumption of almost every type of drug known to civilized man since 1544 A.D. It could only be explained as a *montage,* a sort of exaggerated medical exhibit, put together very carefully to show what might happen if 22 serious drug felons—each with a *different* addiction—were penned up together in the same room for five days and nights, without relief.

Indeed. But of course that would never happen in real Life, gentlemen. We just put this thing together for *demonstration* purposes . . .

Suddenly the phone was ringing, jerking me out of my fantasy stupor. I looked at it. Riiiinnnnnggggggg . . . Jesus, what now? Is this *it?* I could almost hear the shrill voice of the Manager, Mr. Heem, saying the police were on their way up to my room and would I please not shoot through the door when they began kicking it down.

Riinnnnggggg . . . No, they wouldn't call first. Once they decided to take me, they would probably set an ambush in the elevator: first Mace, then a gang-swarm. It would come with no warning.

So I picked up the phone. It was my friend Bruce Innes, calling from the Circus-Circus. He had located the man who wanted to sell the ape I'd been inquiring about. The price was $750.

"Last night it was $400," I said. "What kind of a greedhead are we dealing with?"

"He claims he just found out it was housebroken," said Bruce. "He let it sleep in the trailer last night, and the thing actually shit in the shower stall."

"That doesn't mean anything," I said. "Apes are attracted to water. Next time it'll shit in the sink."

"Maybe you should come down and argue with the guy," said Bruce. "He's here in the bar with me. I told him you really wanted the ape and that you could give it a fine home. I think he'll negotiate. He's really *attached* to the stinking thing. It's here in the bar with us, sitting up on a goddamn stool, slobbering into a beer schooner."

"Okay," I said. "I'll be there in ten minutes. Don't let the bastard get drunk. I want to meet him under natural conditions."

* * *

WHEN I got to the Circus-Circus they were loading an old man into an ambulance outside the main door. "What happened?" I asked the carkeeper.

"I'm not sure," he said. "Somebody said he had a stroke. But I noticed the back of his head was all cut up." He slid into the Whale and handed me a stub. "You want me to save your drink for you?" he asked, holding up a big glass of tequila that was on the seat of the car. "I can put it in the cooler if you want."

I nodded. These people were familiar with my habits. I had been in and out of the place so often, with Bruce and the other band members, that the car-keepers knew me by name—although I'd never introduced myself, and nobody had ever asked me. I just assumed it was all part of the gig here; that they'd probably rifled the glove compartment and found a notebook with my name on it.

The real reason, which didn't occur to me at the time, was that I was still wearing my ID/badge from the District Attorney's conference. It was dangling from the pocket-flap of my multi-colored bird-shooting jacket, but I'd long since forgotten about it. No doubt they all assumed I was some kind of super-weird undercover agent . . . or maybe not; maybe they were just humoring me because they figured anybody crazy enough to pose as a cop while driving around Vegas in a white Cadillac convertible with a drink in his hand almost *had* to be Heavy, and perhaps even dangerous. In a scene where nobody with any ambition is really what he appears to be, there's not much risk in acting like a king-hell freak. The overseers will nod wisely at each other and mutter about "these goddamn no-class put-ons."

The other side of that coin is the "Goddamn! Who's *that*?" syndrome. This comes from people like doormen and floor-walkers who assume that anybody who acts crazy, but still tips big, *must* be important—which means he should be humored, or at least treated gently.

But none of this makes any difference with a head full of mescaline. You just blunder around, doing anything that seems to be right, and it usually is. Vegas is so full of natural freaks—people who are genuinely twisted—that drugs aren't really a problem, except for cops, and the scag syndicate. Psychedelics are almost irrelevant in a town where you can wander into a casino any time of the day or night and witness the crucifixion of a gorilla—on a flaming neon cross that suddenly turns into a pinwheel, spinning the beast around in wild circles above the crowded gambling action.

I found Bruce at the bar, but there was no sign of the ape. "Where is it?" I demanded. "I'm ready to write a check. I want to take the bastard back home on the plane with me. I've already reserved two first-class seats—R. Duke and Son."

"Take him on the *plane*?"

"Hell yes," I said. "You think they'd *say* anything? Call attention to my son's infirmities?"

He shrugged. "Forget it," he said. "They just took him away. He attacked an old man right here at the bar. The creep started hassling the bartender about 'allowing barefoot rabble in the place' and just about then the ape let out a shriek—so the old guy threw a beer at him, and the ape went crazy, came out of his seat like a jack-in-the-box and took a big bite out of the old man's head . . . the bartender had to call an ambulance, then the cops came and took the ape away."

"Goddamnit," I said. "What's the bail? I *want* that ape."

"Get a grip on yourself," he said. "You better stay clear of that jail. That's all they'd need to put the cuffs on you. Forget that ape. You don't need him."

I gave it some thought, then decided he was probably right. There was no sense blowing everything for the sake of some violent ape I'd never even met. For all I knew, he'd take a bite out of *my* head if I tried to bail him out. It would take him a while to calm down, after the shock of being put behind bars, and I couldn't afford to wait around.

"When are you taking off?" Bruce asked.

"As soon as possible," I said. "No point hanging around this town any longer. I have all I need. Anything else would only confuse me."

He seemed surprised. "You *found* the American Dream?" he said. "In *this* town?"

I nodded. "We're sitting on the main nerve right now," I said. "You remember that story the manager told us about the owner of this place? How he always wanted to run away and join the circus when he was a kid?"

Bruce ordered two more beers. He looked over the casino for a moment, then shrugged. "Yeah, I see what you mean," he said. "Now the bastard has his *own* circus, and a license to steal, too." He nodded. "You're right—he's the model."

"Absolutely," I said. "It's pure Horatio Alger, all the way down to his attitude. I tried to have a talk with him, but some heavy-sounding dyke who claimed to be his Executive Secretary told me to fuck off. She said she hates the press worse than anything else in America."

"Him and Spiro Agnew," Bruce muttered.

"They're both right," I said. "I tried to tell the woman that I agreed with everything he stood for, but she said if I knew what was good for me I'd get the hell out of town and not even *think* about bothering the Boss. 'He really hates reporters,' she said. 'I don't mean this to sound like a warning, but if I were you I'd take it that way. . . . '"

Bruce nodded. The Boss was paying him a thousand bucks a week to work two sets a night in the Leopard Lounge, and another two grand for the group. All they had to do was make a hell of a lot of noise for two hours every night. The Boss didn't give a flying fuck what kind of songs they sang, just as long as the beat was heavy and the amps were turned up loud enough to lure people into the bar.

* * *

IT WAS strange to sit there in Vegas and hear Bruce singing powerful stuff like "Chicago" and "Country Song." If the management had bothered to hear the lyrics, the whole band would have been tarred and feathered.

Several months later, in Aspen, Bruce sang the same songs in a club jammed with tourists and Wally Schirra, the astronaut . . . and when the last set was over, Schirra came over to our table and began yelling all kinds of drunken, super-patriot gibberish, hitting on Bruce about "What kind of nerve does a goddamn *Canadian* have to come down here and *insult this country?*"

"Say man," I said. "I'm an *American.* I live here, and I agree with every fucking word he says."

At this point the hash-bouncers appeared, grinning inscrutably and saying: "Good evening to you gentlemen. The *I Ching* says it's time to be quiet, right? And *nobody* hassles the musicians in this place, is that clear?"

Schirra left, muttering darkly about using his influence to "get something done, damn quick," about the Immigration Statutes. "What's *your name?*" he asked me, as the hash-bouncers eased him away.

"Bob Zimmerman," I said. "And if there's one thing I hate in this world, it's a goddamn bonehead Polack."

"You think I'm a *Polack*?" he screamed. "You dirty *goldbricker!* You're all *shit*! You don't *represent* this country."

"Christ, let's hope to hell *you* don't," Bruce muttered. Schirra was still raving as they muscled him out to the street.

The next night, in another restaurant, Schirra was scarfing up his chow—stone sober — when a 14-year-old boy approached the table to ask for Wally's autograph. Schirra acted coy for a moment, feigning embarrassment, then he scrawled his signature on the small piece of paper the boy handed him. The boy looked at it for a moment, then tore it into small pieces and dropped it in Schirra's lap. "Not everybody loves you, man," he said. Then he went back and sat down at his own table, about six feet away.

The Schirra party was speechless. Eight or ten people—wives, managers and favored senior engineers, showing Wally a good time in fabulous Aspen. Now they looked like somebody had just sprayed their table with shit-mist. Nobody said a word. They ate quickly, and left without tipping.

So much for Aspen and astronauts. And the American Dream?

A little bit of this town goes a very long way. After five days in Vegas you feel like you've been there for five years. Some people say they like it—but then some people like Nixon, too. He would have made a perfect Mayor for this town; with John Mitchell as Sheriff and Agnew as Master of Sewers.

XIII
End of the road . . . death of the Whale . . . fear & loathing in the airport

WHEN I tried to sit down at the baccarat table the bouncers put the arm on me. "You don't belong here," one of them said quietly. "Let's go outside."

"Why not?" I said.

They took me out to the front entrance and signaled for the Whale to be brought up. "Where's your friend?" they asked, while we waited.

"What friend?"

"The big spic."

"Look," I said. "I'm a Doctor of Journalism. You'd never catch me hanging around this place with a goddamn spic."

They laughed. "Then what about *this?*" they said. And they confronted me with a big photograph of me and my attorney sitting at a table in the floating bar.

I shrugged. "That's not me," I said. "That's a guy named Thompson. He works for ROLLING STONE . . . a really vicious, crazy kind of person. And that guy sitting next to him is a hit-man for the Mafia in Hollywood. Shit, have you *studied* this photograph? What kind of a maniac would roam around Vegas wearing *one black glove.*"

"We noticed that," they said. "Where is he *now?*"

I shrugged. "He moves around pretty fast," I said. "His orders come out of St. Louis."

They stared at me. "How do *you* know all this stuff?"

I showed them my gold PBA badge, flashing it quickly with my back to the crowd. "Act natural," I whispered. "Don't put me on the spot."

They were still standing there when I drove off in the Whale. The geek had brought it up at exactly the right moment. I gave him a five-dollar bill and hit the street with a stylish screech of rubber.

It was all over now. I drove to the Flamingo and loaded all my luggage into the car. I tried to put the top up, for privacy, but something was wrong with the motor. The generator light had been on, fiery red, ever since I'd driven the thing into Lake Mead. A quick run along the dashboard disclosed that every circuit in the car was totally fucked. Nothing worked. Not even the headlights — and when I hit the air conditioner button I heard a nasty explosion under the hood.

The top was jammed about halfway up, but I decided to try for the airport. If this goddamn junker wouldn't run right, I could always abandon it and call a cab. To hell with garbage from Detroit. They shouldn't be allowed to get away with it.

EVERYTHING seems to be ready. Are you Ready? Ready?

Well, why not? This is a heavy day in Vegas. A thousand cops are checking out of town, scurrying through the airport in groups of three and six. They are heading back home. The drug conference is finished. The Airport Lounge is humming with mean talk and bodies. Short beers and Bloody Marys, here and there a victim of chest rash rubbing Mexsana under the armpit straps of a thick shoulder holster. No point hiding this business any longer. Let it all hang out . . . or at least get some air to it.

Yes, thank you kindly . . . I think I busted a button on my trousers. I hope they don't fall down. You don't want my trousers to fall down now, do you?

Fuck no. Not today. Not right here in the middle of the Las Vegas airport, on this sweaty-hard morning at the tail end of this mass meeting on Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs.

"When the train . . . come in the station . . . I looked her in the eye. . ."

Grim music in this airport.

"Yes, it's hard to tell it's hard to tell, when all your love's in Vain. . . ."

* * *

EVERY now and then you run up on one of those days when *everything's* in vain . . . a stone bummer from start to finish; and if you know what's good for you, on days like these you sort of hunker down in a safe corner and *watch*. Maybe think a bit. Lay back on a cheap wooden chair, screened off from the traffic, and shrewdly rip the poptops out of five or eight Budweisers . . . smoke off a pack of King Marlboros, eat a peanut-butter sandwich, and finally toward evening gobble up a wad of good mescaline . . . then drive out, later on, to the beach. Get out in the surf, in the fog, and slosh along on numb-frozen feet about ten yards out from the tideline . . . stomping through tribes of wild sandpeckers . . . riderunners, whorehoppers, stupid little birds and crabs and saltsuckers, with here and there a big pervert or woolly reject gimping off in the distance, wandering alone by themselves behind the dunes and driftwood. . . .

These are the ones you will never be properly introduced to — at least not if your luck holds. But the beach is less complicated than a boiling fast morning in the Las Vegas airport.

I felt very obvious. Amphetamine psychosis? Paranoid dementia?—What *is* it? My Argentine luggage? This crippled, loping walk that once made me a reject from the Naval ROTC?

Indeed. *This man will never be able to walk straight, Captain! Because one leg is longer than the other. . . .* Not much. Three eighths of an inch or so, which counted out to about two-eighths more than the Captain could tolerate.

So we parted company. He accepted a command in the South China Sea, and I became a Doctor of Gonzo Journalism . . . and many years later, killing time in the Las Vegas airport this terrible morning, I picked up a newspaper and saw where my Captain had fucked up very badly:

SHIP COMMANDER BUTCHERED BY NATIVES AFTER "ACCIDENTAL" ASSAULT ON GUAM

(AOP) — *Aboard the U.S.S. Crazy Horse: Somewhere in the Pacific* (Sept. 25)—The entire 3465-man crew of this newest American aircraft carrier is in violent mourning today, after five crewmen including the Captain were diced up like pineapple meat in a brawl with the Heroin Police at the neutral port of Hong See. Dr. Bloor, the ship's chaplain, presided over tense funeral services at dawn on the flght deck. The 4th Fleet Service Choir sang "Tom Thumb's Blues" . . . and then, when the ship's bells tolled frantically, the remains of the five were set afire in a gourd and hurled into the Pacific by a hooded officer known only as "The Commander."

Shortly after the services ended, the crewmen fell to fighting among themselves and all communications with the ship were severed for an indefinite period. Official spokesmen at 4th Fleet Headquarters on Guam said the Navy had "no comment" on the situation, pending the results of a top-level investigation by a team of civilian specialists headed by former New Orleans district attorney James Garrison.

. . . Why bother with newspapers, if this is all they offer? Agnew was right. The press is a gang of cruel faggots. Journalism is not a profession or a trade. It is a cheap catch-all for fuckoffs and misfits—a false doorway to the backside of life, a filthy piss-ridden little hole nailed off by the building inspector, but just deep enough for a wino to curl up from the sidewalk and masturbate like a chimp in a zoo-cage.

XIV
Farewell to Vegas . . . 'God's mercy on you swine!'

AS I skulked around the airport, I realized that I was still wearing my police identification badge. It was a flat orange rectangle, sealed in clear plastic, that said: "Raoul Duke, Special Investigator, Los Angeles." I saw it in the mirror above the urinal.

Get rid of this thing, I thought. Tear it off. The gig is all over . . . and it proved nothing. At least not to me. And certainly not to my attorney—who also had a badge—but now he was back in Malibu, nursing his paranoid sores.

It had been a waste of time, a lame fuckaround that was only—in clear retrospect — a cheap excuse for a thousand cops to spend a few days in Las Vegas and lay the bill on the taxpayers. Nobody had *learned* anything—or at least nothing new. Except maybe me . . . and all I learned was that the National District Attorneys' Association is about ten years behind the grim truth and harsh kinetic realities of what they have only just recently learned to call "the Drug Culture" in this foul year of Our Lord, 1971.

They are still burning the taxpayers for thousands of dollars to make films about "the dangers of LSD," at a time when acid is widely known — to everybody but cops — to be the Studebaker of the drug market, the popularity of psychedelics having fallen off so drastically that most volume dealers no longer even handle quality acid or mescaline except as a favor to special customers: Mainly jaded, over-30 drug dilettantes—like me, and my attorney.

The big market, these days, is in Downers. Reds and smack, seconal and heroin . . . and a hellbroth of bad domestic grass sprayed with everything from arsenic to horse tranquillizers. What sells, today, is whatever Fucks You Up — whatever short-circuits your brain and grounds it out for the longest possible time. The ghetto market has mushroomed into suburbia. The Miltown man has turned, with a venegeance, to skin-popping and even mainlining . . . and for every ex-speed freak who drifted, for relief, into smack, there are 200 kids who went straight to the needle off seconal. They never even bothered to *try* speed.

Uppers are no longer stylish. Methedrine is almost as rare, on the 1971 market, as pure acid or DMT. A hit of real mescaline that went for $5 on a seller's market in early 1969 now goes for 60¢. "Consciousness Expansion" went out with LBJ . . . and it is worth noting, historically, that downers came in with Nixon.

* * *

I LIMPED onto the plane with no problem except a wave of ugly vibrations from the other passengers . . . but my head was so burned out, by then, that I wouldn't have cared if I'd had to climb aboard stark naked and covered with open chancres. It would have taken *extreme physical force* to keep me off that plane. I was so far beyond simple fatigue that I was beginning to feel nicely adjusted to the idea of permanent hysteria. I felt like the slighest misunderstanding with the stewardess would cause me to either cry or go mad . . . and the woman seemed to sense this, because she treated me very gently.

When I wanted more ice cubes for my bloody mary, she brought them quickly . . . and when I ran out of cigarettes, she gave me a pack from her own purse. The only time she seemed nervous was when I pulled a grapefruit out of my satchel and began slicing it up with a hunting knife. I noticed her watching me closely, so I tried to smile. "I never go anywhere without grapefruit," I said. "It's hard to get a really good one—unless you're rich."

She nodded.

I flashed her the grimace/smile again, but it was hard to know what she was thinking. It was entirely possible, I knew, that she'd already decided to have me taken off the plane in a cage when we got to Denver. I stared fixedly into her eyes for a time, but she kept herself under control.

* * *

I WAS asleep when our plane hit the runway, but the jolt brought me instantly awake. I looked out the window and saw the Rocky Mountains. What the fuck was I doing *here?* I wondered. It made no sense at all. I decided to call my attorney as soon as possilbe. Have him wire me some money to buy a huge albino Doberman. Denver is a national clearing house for stolen Dobermans; they come from all parts of the country.

Since I was already here, I thought I might as well pick up a vicious dog. But first, something for my nerves. Immediately after the plane landed I rushed up the corridor to the airport drugstore and asked the clerk for a box of amyls.

She began to fidget and shake her head. "Oh, no," she said finally. "I can't sell *those* things except by prescription."

"I know," I said. "But you see, I'm a *doctor*. I don't need a prescription."

She was still fidgeting. "Well . . . you'll have to show me some I.D." she moaned.

"Of course." I jerked out my wallet and let her see the police badge while I flipped through the deck until I located my Ecclestiastical Discount Card—which identifies me as a Doctor of Divinity, a certified Minister of the Church of the New Truth.

She inspected it carefully, then handed it back. I sensed a new respect in her manner. He eyes grew warm. She seemed to want to touch me. "I hope you'll forgive me, Doctor," she said with a fine smile. "But I had to ask. We get some *real freaks* in this place. All kinds of dangerous addicts. You'd never believe it."

"Don't worry," I said. "I understand perfectly. But I have a bad heart and I hope—"

"Certainly!" she exclaimed—and within seconds she was back with a dozen amyls. I paid without quibbling about the eccelesiastical discount. Then I opened the box and cracked one under my nose immediately, while she watched.

"Just be thankful your heart is young and strong," I said. "If I were you I would never . . . ah . . . holy shit! . . . what? Yes, you'll have to excuse me now; I feel it coming on." I turned away and reeled off in the general direcon of the bar.

"God's mercy on you swine!" I shouted at two Marines coming out of the mens' room.

They looked at me, but said nothing. By this time I was laughing crazily. But it made no difference. I was just another fucked-up cleric with a bad heart. Shit, they'll love me down at the Brown Palace. I took another big hit off the amyl, and by the time I got to the bar my heart was full of joy. I felt like a monster reincarnation of Horatio Alger . . . a Man on the Move, and just sick enough to be totally confident.

THE SUN was coming up when I got to the airport. I left the Whale in the VIP parking lot. A kid about 15 years old checked it in, but I refused to answer his questions. He was very excited about the overall *condition* of the vehicle. "Holy God!" he kept shouting. "How did *this* happen?" He kept moving around the car, pointing at various dents, rips and crushed places.

"I know," I said. "They beat the shit out of it. This is a terrible goddamn town for driving around in convertibles. The worst time was right out on the Boulevard in front of the Sahara. You know that corner where all the junkies hang out? Jesus, I couldn't believe it when they all went crazy *at once.*"

The kid was none too bright. His face had gone blank early on, and now, he seemed in a state of mute fear.

"Don't worry," I said. "I'm insured." I showed him the contract, pointing to the small-print clause where it said I was insured against *all damages*, for only two dollars a day.

The kid was still nodding when I fled. I felt a bit guilty about leaving him to deal with the car. There was no way to explain the massive damage. It was finished, a wreck, totaled out. Under normal circumstances I would have been seized and arrested when I tried to turn it in . . . but not at this hour of the morning, with only this kid to deal with. I was, after all, a "VIP." Otherwise, they would never have chartered the car to me in the first place. . . .

Let the chickens come home to roost, I thought as I hurried into the airport. It was still too early to act normal, so I hunkered down in the coffee shop behind the L.A. Times. Somewhere down the corridor a jukebox was playing "One Toke Over the Line." I listened for a moment, but my nerve ends were no longer receptive. The only song I might have been able to relate to, at that point, was "Mister Tambourine Man." Or maybe "Memphis Blues Again. . . ."

"Awww, mama . . . can this really . . . be the end . . .?"

My plane left at eight, which meant I had two hours to kill. Feeling desperately visible. There was no doubt in my mind that they were looking for me; the net was closing down . . . . it was only a matter of time before they ran me down like some kind of rabid animal.

I checked all my luggage through the chute. All but the leather satchel, which was full of drugs. And the .357. Did they have the goddamn metal detector system in this airport? I strolled around to the boarding gate and tried to look casual while I cased the area for black boxes. None were visible. I decided to take the chance — just zip through the gate with a big smile on my face, mumbling distractedly about "a bad slump in the hardware market . . . ."

Just another failed salesman checking out. Blame it all on that bastard Nixon. Indeed. I decided it might look more natural if I found somebody to chat with — a routine line of small talk, between passengers:

"Hy're yew, fella! I guess you're probably wonderin' what makes me sweat like this? Yeah! Well, god *damn,* man! Have you read the newspapers today? . . . . You'd never believe what those dirty bastards have done *this* time!"

I figured that would cover it . . . . but I couldn't find anybody who looked safe enough to talk to. The whole airport was full of people who looked like they might go for my floating rib if I made a false move. I felt very paranoid . . . . like some kind of criminal skullsucker on the lam from Scotland Yard.

Everywhere I looked I saw Pigs . . . . because on that morning the Las Vegas airport *was* full of cops — the mass exodus after the climax of the District Attorneys' conference. When I finally put this together I felt much better about the health of my own brain . . . . but while it was happening, on that morning in the airport, this heinous "delusion" put me right out on the edge.